Asia Pacific Science Press

Social Pressure and Youth Employment Intentions:Evidence from CLDS and Implications for Sustainable Development in China

Weiwei Li*, Teng Long

School of Public Finance and Taxation, Guangdong University of Finance and Economics, Guangzhou 510320, China
*Corresponding author: Weiwei Li

Abstract: Decent work and economic growth are fundamental components of sustainable development, as emphasized in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG 8). This study empirically examines the impact of social pressure on youth employment intentions within the SDG 8 framework, aiming to provide insights for policymakers and contribute to the literature on sustainable development. Utilizing data from 1779 respondents in the 2018 China Labor-force Dynamics Survey (CLDS2018) and applying a Pooled OLS model, the findings reveal that increased job security pressure and lower social recognition significantly reduce employment intentions among youth. Contrary to expectations, social exclusion shows no statistically significant effect. As individuals age, employment intentions increase due to rising family economic responsibilities. Male workers demonstrate higher sensitivity to social pressure, especially regarding social status, leading to a sharper decline in employment intentions. Additionally, only children experience greater effects of social pressure compared to those with siblings. These results highlight the complex interplay between social factors and employment decisions among youth. The study suggests that policies should aim to mitigate social pressure, particularly by enhancing job security and social recognition, to boost youth economic participation and support sustainable development goals. While the cross-sectional nature of the data limits causal inferences, this research provides a foundation for future longitudinal studies and cross-cultural comparisons in the context of sustainable development and youth employment.

Keywords: Employment Intentions; Social Pressure; Job Security; Youth Employment; Decent Work; Sustainable Development

1.Introduction

Sustainable development has become a global imperative, with decent work and economic growth serving as crucial components, as emphasized in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG 8)[1]. The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines decent work as "productive employment under conditions of freedom, equity, security, and dignity"[2]. This concept not only enhances individual well-being but also serves as a critical foundation for sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction[3].

However, achieving decent work and equitable economic growth remains a global challenge, particularly for youth employment[4]. The recent "Couch Potato" phenomenon among youth, characterized by voluntary unemployment and withdrawal

from traditional career aspirations, reflects growing disillusionment with societal competition[5]. This trend, observed globally through phenomena such as "Hikikomori" in Japan and the rise of "NEETs" (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) after the 2008 financial crisis, poses significant challenges to sustainable development [6].

China's ongoing economic transition, marked by a shift from rapid to moderate growth, presents both opportunities and challenges for youth employment[7]. While economic development has diversified life choices for young people, intensified competition and social pressures have led some to adopt passive employment attitudes[8]. This situation is particularly concerning given China's rapidly aging population, which makes youth creativity crucial for high-quality, sustainable economic growth[9].

Despite the growing body of literature on youth employment and sustainable development[10], there remains a gap in understanding the specific impact of social pressure on youth employment intentions, particularly in the context of emerging economies like China. This study aims to bridge this gap by investigating the following research questions:

RQ1. What factors motivate young workers to adopt passive employment attitudes?

RQ2. How does social pressure influence youth employment intentions?

RQ3. Are there differences in employment intentions among different demographic groups when facing social pressure?

Drawing on data from the 2018 China Labor Dynamics Survey (CLDS2018), this study employs a Pooled OLS model to analyze the relationships between various dimensions of social pressure (job security, social recognition, and social exclusion) and employment intentions. Our research contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence on the complex interplay between social factors and employment decisions, with important implications for achieving SDG 8.

Key findings reveal that increased job security pressure and lower social recognition significantly reduce employment intentions among youth, while social exclusion shows no statistically significant effect. Additionally, we observe notable differences in the impact of social pressure across gender and family structure, with male workers and only children demonstrating higher sensitivity to certain aspects of social pressure.

This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews relevant theories and presents hypotheses; Section 3 details the research design, including variable definitions, model construction, and data sources; Section 4 presents the empirical results; and Section 5 discusses the conclusions, policy implications, and directions for future research in the context of sustainable development.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Proposal

2.1 The Logical Motivation Behind the Employment "Couch Potato" Phenomenon

Unemployment is typically categorized into two types: voluntary and involuntary unemployment. Keynes, in The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money, attributes involuntary unemployment to "employment behavior arising from insufficient demand," where workers are willing to work at prevailing wage levels and conditions, but economic downturns prevent employment opportunities. In contrast, Pigou's concept of voluntary unemployment suggests that the workforce, despite being skilled and capable, may still choose to remain unemployed. This voluntary unemployment often stems from a refusal to accept current wage levels, dissatisfaction with the occupational system, or as a response to social pressures. This tendency toward voluntary unemployment is especially pronounced among young people entering the workforce.

Given the close link between economic structure and unemployment rates, economic studies generally focus on involuntary unemployment, viewing voluntary unemployment as part of the natural unemployment rate. However, with the rise of cultural trends such as "Couch Potato," "Buddhist-style," and "sang culture," the proportion of young workers opting for voluntary unemployment has grown significantly, raising questions about the formation of this collective "employment Couch Potato" phenomenon[11].

Some scholars argue that the "Couch Potato" phenomenon reflects young people's aversion to employment, a psychological reaction shaped by negative social culture. Despite appearing "uncompetitive and content," it actually signals pessimism and negative values. Furthermore, the early family planning policy in China, which resulted in many only-child families, has led to overindulgence by parents, fostering a lack of independence and responsibility in youth, and contributing to their choice

to forgo employment opportunities and become part of the "NEET" group[12]. While these young people should ideally strive toward life goals during the formative stages of their careers, many instead retreat[13].

Other scholars suggest that young people, as social actors with cognitive and reflective abilities, may choose passive labor participation or voluntary unemployment as a self-protective strategy, avoiding low-level job convergence and repetitive consumption, and seeking to maintain economic status[14]. The "Couch Potato" debate provides a valuable lens for examining employment intentions among youth, prompting an investigation into the underlying motivations of this behavior.

From an economic rationality perspective, workers typically make decisions that align with their interests, driven by the desire to maximize personal benefits. Young workers who opt for passive labor participation or voluntary unemployment often do so due to unfavorable socioeconomic conditions, information asymmetry in the labor market, or unrealistically high expectations. Comparing their human capital with market standards, some individuals, based on economic rationality, may determine that entering a "waiting period" is the best option, leading to the rise of the "Couch Potato" phenomenon[15][16].

Thus, the "Couch Potato" phenomenon among young workers cannot merely be attributed to personal or group characteristics but must be understood in light of broader structural social and economic factors. This behavior reflects the logic behind employment choices and warrants further investigation.

2.2 Job Security as a Factor in Employment Decisions

Job security is a crucial factor in employment decisions. Under the current wage accumulation system, job security (measured through basic pension, medical insurance, injury insurance, unemployment insurance, maternity insurance, and housing provident funds) is closely linked to employment duration and personal income levels. From a capital investment perspective, a comprehensive job security system reduces workers' financial burdens, encouraging them to remain in their current employment[17].

These accumulative benefits of job security systems enhance employment intentions. However, young workers, who are still in the early stages of their careers, typically lack accumulated work experience, material capital, and personal savings. Compared to older workers, younger individuals have less capacity for self-protection and are thus more likely to seek formal employment with comprehensive job security[18]. In contrast, laborers in jobs lacking security may experience anxiety about unemployment or injury, which, combined with aspirations for a better life, lowers their employment intentions.

Thus, Hypothesis 1 is proposed: Job security risk pressures reduce workers' employment willingness.

2.3 Subjective Emotional Stress and Employment Intentions

Subjective well-being is often used to measure employment quality. Typically, a stable work environment, autonomous job choices, and good career development opportunities increase job satisfaction and reduce unemployment tendencies driven by disillusionment[19][20]. The risk of subjective emotional stress arises from various sources.

First, a comparison-oriented mindset is common among youth. Under varying job conditions, some young people compare themselves to those in better positions, leading to feelings of occupational inferiority and dissatisfaction. Second, age is an important factor in emotional risk. As individuals age, family responsibilities, including child-rearing and parental support, increase, reinforcing the need for continued employment. In contrast, younger workers, less burdened by financial obligations, may adopt the mindset of "youth as capital," making them more prone to voluntary unemployment.

Third, social class and identity play a crucial role. A strong sense of social identity correlates with higher employment satisfaction[21]. Factors such as class identity, household registration, and language skills influence social recognition and affect employment decisions. The concept of "face" in Chinese social relations is particularly significant for young male workers. When their "face" is compromised, men are more likely to develop negative emotions, leading to increased unemployment intentions.

Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 2: Low socioeconomic identification leads to negative employment intentions.

Hypothesis 3: Younger workers are more influenced by subjective emotions, with employment intentions increasing with age.

Hypothesis 4: Male workers are more negatively affected by subjective emotional stress than females, making them more prone to reduced employment willingness.

2.4 Social Exclusion Stress and Employment Intentions

Since the 1970s, scholars have identified a negative relationship between the extent of social interactions and employment rates[22]. When individuals limit their social activities to the home, social isolation can develop, causing them to avoid broader social relationships and leading to aversion to work. Conversely, this isolation results in the loss of effective social support, further reinforcing unemployment tendencies[23].

During the early stages of the workforce, difficulties in integrating into social networks pose a risk of social exclusion. According to social integration theory, regular social interactions are essential for individuals to integrate into social networks. When youth fail to engage in these interactions, they often retreat into self-isolation, as exemplified by the "hikikomori" phenomenon in Japan.

Moreover, social capital and emotional support within networks can create potential job opportunities. However, social fragmentation limits access to this "opportunity network," making it difficult for young workers to secure suitable employment and leading to emotional depletion and eventual withdrawal from the labor market[24].

Thus, Hypothesis 5 is proposed: Social exclusion stress decreases the employment willingness of young workers.

3. Research Design: Variables, Models, and Sources

Before conducting the empirical analysis, this paper provides a detailed description of the variables, data sources, and model construction used to support the analysis.

3.1 Data Sources

The data for this study are drawn from the 2018 China Labor-force Dynamics Survey (CLDS2018), conducted by the Center for Social Science Survey at Sun Yat-sen University. The center also carried out baseline surveys in 2012 and follow-up surveys in 2014 and 2016. The 2018 survey covered 29 provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions (excluding Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan region, Tibet, and Hainan), collecting data from 16,537 individuals aged 15-64 through mobile questionnaires from 13,501 households in 368 communities. The survey covered various aspects, including economic status, education, household registration, migration, employment, agricultural production, and social participation of the labor force. This study focuses on the factors influencing voluntary unemployment among young workers, selecting individuals aged 16-35 as the study sample. After excluding cases with missing data, the final effective sample size is 1,779.

3.2 Variable Design and Selection

3.2.1 Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this study is employment intention. The CLDS survey includes three key questions related to job desire: "Do you currently want a job (either full-time or part-time)?", "Do you plan to look for a job in the next year?", and "How important is working to you?" These are categorized as both dichotomous and continuous variables. The study converts unemployment intention into a continuous variable using probability weighting for subsequent analysis.

3.2.2 Core Independent Variables

Job Security Risk Pressure: Six indicators from the questionnaire are used to measure job security, including medical insurance, pension insurance, housing provident fund, work injury insurance, maternity insurance, and unemployment insurance. Respondents receive a score of 0 if they have the insurance and 1 if they do not. The weighted sum of these indicators forms the job security pressure index, where a higher index indicates greater job security pressure.

Subjective Emotional Stress: This variable is constructed using several questionnaire items, such as "sense of happiness," "satisfaction with life and family economic status," and "perception of freedom and social status." These indicators are weighted, summed, and normalized, with values ranging from 0 to 1; higher values represent greater subjective emotional stress.

Social Exclusion Stress: Social exclusion stress is measured through questions on social networks, such as "number of friends to confide in," "number of friends who can lend money," and "degree of familiarity, trust, and mutual aid with neighbors." The first two are transformed into inverse indicators using the range transformation method. These indicators are weighted and summed, then normalized, with higher values indicating greater social exclusion stress.

3.2.3 Control Variables

To reduce bias in the model estimation, this study includes control variables related to unemployment intentions, following the approaches of Xiu Yaohua (2010)[24] and Wu Youmeng (2020)[25]. Control variables include gender, age, age squared, marital status, number of siblings, household registration type, education level, work experience, and number of children. Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics and selection of variables used in the model.

Table 1. Description of Variable Selection.

Category	Primary Indicator	Secondary Indicator	Description
Dependent Variable	Employment Intention	Current desire to find a job	Want to work=3; Temporarily no desire=2; Do not want to work=1
		Future desire to find a job	Want to work=3; Temporarily no desire=2; Do not want to work=1
		Importance of work to you	Very important=4; Quite important=3; Not so important=2; Unimportant=1
	Social Security Pressure	Basic medical insurance for urban residents	No insurance=1; Has insurance=0
		Social pension insurance for urban residents	No insurance=1; Has insurance=0
		Housing provident fund	No insurance=1; Has insurance=0
		Work injury insurance	No insurance=1; Has insurance=0
		Maternity insurance	No insurance=1; Has insurance=0
		Unemployment insurance	No insurance=1; Has insurance=0
Core Explanatory Variables	Work-Life Pressure	Happiness with life	Unsatisfied=5; Fairly satisfied=4; Average=3; Fairly satisfied=2; Very satisfied=1
		Satisfaction with living conditions	Unsatisfied=5; Fairly satisfied=4; Average=3; Fairly satisfied=2; Very satisfied=1
		Satisfaction with family economic conditions	Unsatisfied=5; Fairly satisfied=4; Average=3; Fairly satisfied=2; Very satisfied=1
		Freedom in life	Ranked 1-10, higher numbers mean less freedom
		Social class of family	Ranked 1-10, higher numbers mean lower social class
		Own social class	Ranked 1-10, higher numbers mean lower social class
		Fairness of living standards compared to work effort	Unfair=3; Cannot say=2; Fair=1
	Social Pressure	Number of friends to confide in	Number≥0
		Number of friends who can lend money (standard of 5000 Yuan)	Number≥0
		Familiarity with neighbors	Unfamiliar=3; Average=2; Familiar=1
		Trust in neighbors	Distrust=3; Average=2; Trust=1
		Mutual aid with neighbors	Very little=5; Rather little=4; Average=3; Rather much=2; A lot=1
Control Variable		Age	15≤Age≤35
		Gender	Male=1; Female=0
		Marital Status	Married=1; Unmarried=0
		Number of Siblings	Number ≥0
		Household Registration	Urban=1; Rural=0
		Education Level	Elementary or less=1; Junior high=2; High school/Technical=3; Junior college=4; Bachelor's or above=5
		Work Experience	Has worked=1; Never worked=0
		Number of Children	Number ≥0

3.3 Model Setup

To estimate the impact of social pressure on the employment intentions of young workers, this study uses employment intention as the dependent variable and constructs the following quantitative model:

$$\text{Unemp}_i = \beta_a^h \text{Sec\_risk}_i + \partial^h X_i + \varepsilon_i^h \tag{1}$$

$$\text{Unemp}_i = \beta_a^h \text{Emo\_risks}_i + \partial^h X_i + \varepsilon_i^h \tag{2}$$

$$\text{Unemp}_i = \beta_a^h \text{Soc\_risk}_i + \partial^h X_i + \varepsilon_i^h \tag{3}$$

In the model, $\text{Unemp}_{i,t}$ represents the employment intention of the i-th respondent, $\text{Sec\_risk}_{i,t}$ denotes the level of social security pressure, $\text{Emo\_risks}_{i,t}$ indicates the level of subjective emotional stress, $\text{Soc\_risk}_{i,t}$ reflects the level of social exclusion stress, $X_{i,t}$ is the vector of control variables, and $\varepsilon_{i,t}^h$ is the random disturbance term.

4. Empirical Results and Analysis

4.1 Baseline Regression Results

This study initially employs a Pooled OLS model to analyze changes in employment intentions among young workers when exposed to three types of social pressures: job security, subjective emotional stress, and social exclusion. Models (1) to (3) exclude control variables and incrementally regress the impact of the three social pressure indices on employment intentions. The results indicate that both job security pressure and subjective emotional stress levels significantly and negatively affect employment intentions. Specifically, a one-percentage-point increase in job security pressure leads to a 0.9% to 1% decrease in employment intentions, while a one-percentage-point increase in subjective emotional stress results in a 2.6% decrease in employment intentions. Although social exclusion pressure also has a negative impact on employment intentions, the effect is less than 0.1% and is statistically insignificant.

In Model (4), after including other personal characteristics as control variables, the coefficients for the three types of pressures increased slightly, yet the direction of the coefficients remained consistent. Both job security pressure and subjective emotional stress remained significantly negative at the 10% significance level, strengthening the robustness of the model results.

These findings confirm Hypotheses 1 and 2, demonstrating that an increase in job security risk and a decrease in an individual's socio-economic self-identification both reduce young workers' willingness to work. For Hypothesis 5, while social exclusion pressure negatively affects employment intentions, the results are statistically insignificant. Potential reasons include the following:

Young people possess strong social adaptability: Young individuals are generally more open to new experiences and more eager to make social connections, which reduces the likelihood of experiencing social exclusion.

The substitutive role of social platforms: The rise of social media offers introverted youth alternative avenues for social interaction. Even those who are socially isolated in real life can fulfill their social needs online. Therefore, the risk of voluntary unemployment due to social isolation is diminished.

Moreover, as age increases, the willingness to be employed follows an inverted U-shaped pattern, supporting Hypothesis 3. This suggests that younger workers have lower employment willingness due to subjective emotional factors. However, as they age and face growing pressures such as family responsibilities, they become more inclined to seek employment and avoid unemployment.

Table 2. detailing the baseline model empirical analysis.

Variable	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)
Social Security Pressure Level	-0.009*** (-2.75)	-0.010*** (-2.85)	-0.010*** (-2.81)	-0.008** (-2.11)
Subjective Emotional Stress Level		-0.026*** (-3.32)	-0.026*** (-3.32)	-0.013* (-1.75)
Social Exclusion Stress Level			-0.001 (-0.02)	-0.001 (-0.11)
Age				-0.021*** (-5.62)

Variable	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)
Square of Age				0.001*** (4.95)
Constant	0.879*** (361.70)	0.896*** (162.58)	0.896*** (153.22)	1.149*** (27.87)
Control Variables	No	No	No	Yes
Observations	1779	1779	1779	1779
R-squared	0.112	0.112	0.11	0.114

Notes：*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1; standard errors in parentheses, the same below

4.1.1 Gender Differences

To examine differences in unemployment intentions when facing social pressures between gender groups, this study categorizes young workers into male and female groups for comparative analysis, controlling for age. As indicated by the results in Model 3, a statistically significant negative relationship exists between job security pressure, subjective emotional stress, and unemployment intentions in the male group. However, in the female group, while the negative relationship is present, its impact is not statistically significant. These findings confirm Hypothesis 4, which suggests that men are more sensitive to social pressure and exhibit lower employment intentions when their socioeconomic status is compromised, particularly due to concerns related to "face," leading to heightened stress and anxiety.

Table 3.which presents the gender heterogeneity empirical analysis.

Variable	Gender	
	Male	Female
Social Security Pressure Level	-0.012** (-2.24)	-0.005 (-1.19)
Subjective Emotional Stress Level	-0.020* (-1.74)	-0.004 (-0.39)
Social Exclusion Stress Level	0.007 (0.52)	-0.008 (-0.89)
Constant	1.184*** (17.30)	1.092*** -20.02
Observations	680	1,099
R-squared	0.207	0.082

4.1.2 Differences Based on Number of Siblings

Table 4 presents the differences in unemployment intentions among young workers when facing social pressures, categorized by the number of siblings. The sample is divided into three groups based on family size: those with 0–1, 2–3, and 4 or more siblings. The model results indicate that individuals who are only children or have only one sibling are more significantly affected by social pressure in terms of their employment intentions. In contrast, for individuals with more siblings, the impact of social pressure on employment intentions is not statistically significant.

A plausible explanation for this phenomenon is that in families with one or fewer children, material conditions are generally better, and individuals do not have to bear significant family burdens. As a result, when confronted with social pressures, they are more likely to respond based on personal feelings, exhibiting a stronger tendency toward risk aversion. Conversely, individuals with more siblings may be better equipped to withstand social pressures due to the distribution of family responsibilities, and therefore, their employment intentions are less affected by these pressures.

Table 4.Empirical Analysis of Family Member Heterogeneity.

Variable	Number of Siblings		
	0~1	2~3	4 or more
Social Security Pressure Level	-0.008* (-1.85)	-0.010 (-1.40)	0.007 (0.35)
Subjective Emotional Stress Level	-0.016* (-1.66)	-0.009 (-0.71)	-0.011 (-0.33)
Social Exclusion Stress Level	0.005 -0.56	-0.013 (-0.91)	-0.029 (-0.78)
Constant	1.226*** -23.72	1.024*** (13.33)	1.061*** (4.93)
Observations	1,110	556	113
R-squared	0.137	0.096	0.078

4.1.3 Differences Based on Household Registration

Table 5 illustrates the disparities in unemployment intentions among young workers confronted with social pressures, categorized by household registration type. The findings indicate that only young workers with urban household registration demonstrate a significantly heightened intention to be unemployed when confronted with social security pressures. Regarding other social pressures, the responses of both urban and rural workers are not statistically significant. This phenomenon may be attributed to adjustments within the urban-rural dual economic structure, wherein numerous regions have eliminated the distinction between agricultural and non-agricultural household registrations, consolidating them under a unified resident registration system, thereby gradually diminishing urban-rural registration restrictions. Following the reform of the household registration system, the class identity and social identity of urban and rural workers have gradually converged, while the adverse effects of registration restrictions on worker mobility and employment have diminished.

Table 5.Empirical Analysis of Household Registration Heterogeneity.

Variable	Household Registration	
	Urban	Rural
Social Security Pressure Level	-0.010* (-1.74)	-0.004 (-0.90)
Subjective Emotional Stress Level	-0.010 (-0.69)	-0.013 (-1.54)
Social Exclusion Stress Level	0.021 (1.49)	-0.008 (-0.95)
Constant	1.179*** (14.34)	1.147*** (24.06)
Observations	400	1,379
R-squared	0.195	0.097

4.2 Discussion on Robustness and Endogeneity

To ensure the stability of the estimation results, this study employs "work desire, job-seeking intention, and the importance of work" as proxy variables for employment intentions, while utilizing the duration of unemployment as an alternative dependent variable, conducting a stepwise regression analysis. The results indicate that the direction of the coefficients for the explanatory variables is consistent with prior findings, and all coefficients are statistically significant, thereby affirming the robustness of the results. Furthermore, potential endogeneity issues may arise within the model. Employment intentions, being subjective decisions, may be influenced by omitted variables and may also exhibit reverse causality. To mitigate this issue, the study employs survey data from respondents aged 35 to 45 as an instrumental variable for validation

purposes. The regression results obtained through the instrumental variable method are consistent with those of the baseline model, indicating that the effects of social security pressure, subjective emotional stress, and social exclusion stress on unemployment intentions are robust.

5.Conclusions and Future Directions

This study contributes significantly to the growing body of literature on youth employment within the context of sustainable development, specifically addressing the impact of social pressure on employment intentions. Our findings underscore the complex interplay between various forms of social pressure and youth employment intentions, offering valuable insights for both theoretical advancement and practical applications.

The results reveal that job security pressure and social recognition positively influence youth employment intentions, suggesting these factors serve as key motivators in young individuals' career pursuits. Conversely, social exclusion stress demonstrated an unexpected negative relationship with employment intentions, highlighting the need for a more nuanced understanding of this construct within the youth employment context.

Furthermore, our analysis uncovered significant moderating effects of gender and only-child status on the relationship between social pressure and employment intentions. Male respondents and only children exhibited heightened sensitivity to social pressure in their employment decisions, emphasizing the importance of considering demographic factors in youth employment strategies.

These findings have profound implications for policymakers and organizations striving to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 8, particularly in promoting youth employment and ensuring decent work for all. The results suggest that strategies aimed at enhancing job security and social recognition could potentially boost youth employment rates. However, addressing social exclusion requires a more nuanced approach, given its complex impact on employment intentions.

In light of these findings, we propose several policy recommendations. Firstly, strengthening social security mechanisms, including reforms in unemployment insurance schemes and promotion of stable employment contracts for young workers, could alleviate job security concerns. Secondly, implementing initiatives to valorize diverse career trajectories may foster greater social recognition across various professions. Thirdly, developing tailored programs for specific demographic groups, such as male workers and only children, could address their unique vulnerabilities to social pressure. Additionally, encouraging intergenerational knowledge transfer through structured mentorship schemes could facilitate smoother transitions into the workforce for young individuals.

While this study provides valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The cross-sectional design limits our ability to establish causal relationships definitively, and the regional focus may constrain the generalizability of findings to other cultural and economic contexts. Moreover, the reliance on self-reported measures and potential omission of relevant variables highlight areas for methodological improvement in future research.

Looking ahead, several promising avenues for future research emerge. Longitudinal investigations could elucidate causal relationships and track temporal changes in employment intentions. Cross-cultural comparative analyses would enhance the generalizability of findings, while mixed-method research designs could yield more nuanced insights into young workers' decision-making processes. Further refinement of theoretical constructs, particularly the operationalization of social exclusion stress, is warranted. Lastly, assessing the efficacy of interventions designed to mitigate social pressure and enhance youth employment using quasi-experimental designs could provide valuable evidence for policy formulation.

In conclusion, this study advances our understanding of the complex relationship between social pressure and youth employment intentions within the framework of sustainable development. By addressing the identified limitations and pursuing the proposed research directions, scholars and policymakers can work towards more comprehensive and effective strategies for promoting inclusive economic growth and achieving the goals of sustainable development.

Funding

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Abbreviation

SDG   Sustainable Development Goals

ILO   International Labour Organization

CLD   China Labor Dynamics Survey

OLS   Ordinary Least Squares

References

[1]   Naciones Unidas. Objetivos y Metas de Desarrollo Sostenible—Desarrollo Sostenible. Available online: https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/es/sustainable-development-goals/ (accessed on 22 May 2023).

[2]   United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth I Sustainable Development Goals. Available online: https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals/decent-work-and-economic-growth (accessed on 22 May 2023).

[3]   Foro Económico Mundial. Desafíos Para Hacer Más Sostenible la Sociedad y el Futuro del Trabajo. Available online: https://es.weforum.org/agenda/2020/09/sociedad-y-futuro-del-trabajo-cuales-son-los-desafios-para-hacer-que-la-sociedad-y-el-futuro-del-trabajo-sean-mas-sostenibles/ (accessed on 22 May 2023).

[4]   Chen, B., & Cao, R. (2021). Analysis of the Characteristics and Influencing Factors of Urban Unemployed Young Labor Force—An Explanation Based on the Theory of Delayed Gratification. Journal of East China University of Science and Technology (Social Science Edition), 36(04), 103-111.

[5]   Maeshiro, K. (2018). Low Desire Society. Shanghai Translation Publishing House.

[6]   Liu, W., & Su, J. (2024). Outlook and Policy Recommendations for China's Economic Situation in 2024. Journal of Beijing Jiaotong University (Social Sciences), (01), 25-36. https://doi.org/10.16797/j.cnki.11-5224/c.20240018.008

[7]   Hao, Y., & Hou, H. (2018). Does the Social Security System Exacerbate Unemployment?—A PVAR Analysis Based on OECD Country Data. Economist, 73-81.

[8]   Yang, J. (2023). The Relationship between Population Aging and China's Modern Transformation. Studies on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, (03), 14-26+2.

[9]   Chen, Y., Wang, J., & Zheng, X. (2024). Global Skills Development: Youth, Education, and Employment. Journal of East China Normal University (Educational Sciences), (04), 39-50. https://doi.org/10.16382/j.cnki.1000-5560.2024.04.004

[10] Hou, L. (2020). Analysis and Countermeasures of the Employment Status of Long-term Unemployed Youth. Contemporary Youth Research, 77-82.

[11] Li, C. (2015). NEET and Parasitic Phenomenon of the Post-80s and Post-90s. Heilongjiang Social Sciences, 93-99.

[12] Lin, L., & Gao, Y. (2021). "Lying Flat Youth": An Explanation of Structural Dilemma. China Youth Study, 78-84.

[13] Ma, J., & Le, Z. (2020). Evaluation of Rural Residential Environment Quality and Its Influencing Factors—Based on the Village Data of China Labor Dynamics Survey in 2016. Journal of Hunan Agricultural University (Social Sciences), 21, 45-52+74.

[14] Peng, D. (2021). Involution and Anti-involution: Intergenerational Differences in Social Interaction of Migrant Population. Journal of Shenzhen University (Humanities & Social Sciences), 38, 112-123.

[15] Pei, T. (2021). Research on the Influencing Factors and Mechanism of Social Workers' Job Satisfaction. Social Work, 79-90+109-110.

[16] Peng, D., Ding, F., & Qi, H. (2020). How to Move from Individualization to Social Integration—A Study on the Relationship between Social Participation and Youth Well-being. China Youth Study, 49-55.

[17] Zeng, Q., & Lu, J. (2006). Youth Unemployment and the Risk of Social Relationship Exclusion. Youth Studies, 20-27.

[18] Li, F. (2021). Tsinghua Associate Professor Li Fengliang Said That the Lying Flat Attitude Is Extremely Irresponsible. Is Choosing to Lie Flat Recognize Reality? [EB/OL]. Available online: https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=17009815212 09698859&wfr=spider&for=pc (accessed on 28 May 2021).

[19] Song, D. (2018). The Existential Tragedy of Youth's "Buddhist Life". China Youth Study, 41-45.

[20] Wang, X. (2021). Guide the "Lie-flat Group" to Cherish Their Youth and Strive to Make Progress [EB/OL]. Available online: https://epaper.gmw.cn/gmrb/html/2021-05/20/nw.D110000gmrb_20210520_2-11.html (accessed on 20 May 2021).

[21] Wang, L., & Xiao, K. (2010). A Study on the Individual Rationality of College Students' Voluntary Unemployment Behavior. China Youth Study, 96-100.

[22] Wang, L., & Xiao, K. (2011). Structural Factors and College Students' Voluntary Unemployment: Embedding Problems. China Youth Study, 76-80.

[23] Xiu, Y. (2010). On the Social Protection Policy for Special Groups in China—Research on the Social Security System for Young Workers. Exploration, 135-139.

[24] Wu, Y. (2020). The Impact of Public Service Agglomeration on Labor Flow. Finance & Trade Economics, 120-132.