

# The Relationship between Career Decision-Making Difficulties and Employment Anxiety Among College Students

Jiajuan Li\*, Jingjing He

School of Management, Xi'an Polytechnic University Institute of Population and Social Policy, Xi'an Polytechnic University, Xi'an, 710600, China

\*Corresponding author: Jiajuan Li, 12450676378@163.com

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**Abstract:** Purpose: To explore the relationship between career decision-making difficulties and employment anxiety among college students in a 'Non-Double' college in Shaanxi Province, and to provide reference for college graduates' career choice and mental health interventions. Methods: In this study, 400 graduates from a 'Non-Double' comprehensive university in Shaanxi Province were surveyed, and the Career Decision Difficulty Scale (CDDQ) and Employment Anxiety Scale (EAQ) were used to investigate the graduates' career decision difficulty level and employment anxiety level. Results: The total score of CDDQ was 106.20, and the EAQ score was 35.62; career decision-making difficulties were positively correlated with employment anxiety ( $r = 0.628$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ); regression analysis showed that career decision-making difficulties had a significant effect on employment anxiety, with a regression coefficient of 0.59 ( $P < 0.01$ ). Among the factors of career decision-making difficulties, the lack of preparation and the contradiction of multi-party conflicts could significantly affect employment anxiety, with regression coefficients of 0.21 and 0.42 ( $P < 0.01$ ), respectively. Conclusion: The career decision-making difficulties of graduates from a 'Non-Double' university in Shaanxi Province are at a high level, and employment anxiety is at a moderate level; the more career decision-making difficulties they face at graduation, the higher the level of employment anxiety.

**Keywords:** Graduates; Difficulty in Career Decision-Making; Employment Anxiety

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## 1. Introduction

Employment anxiety refers to the cognitive changes of incompetence, low self-esteem, etc., the emotional reactions of worry, fear and regret, and the corresponding changes in physiological functions produced by individuals when facing employment<sup>[1]</sup>. The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China pointed out that employment is the biggest livelihood, and employment has always been a social concern. The number of college graduates in China is projected to reach 12.22 million in 2025, coupled with the imbalance between supply and demand in the job market, which has increased the difficulty of college students' employment. More and more college students have employment anxiety problems, which seriously affects the physical and mental health of college students. Therefore, the study of factors influencing college students' employment anxiety has become an important topic for its prevention and control.

Difficulties in career decision-making refer to the difficulties that individuals may encounter in making career decisions,

such as lack of career planning, difficulties in exploring career information, etc., which may prevent individuals from making decisions and lead to decisions that are not optimal<sup>[2]</sup>.

Research on career decision-making difficulties and employment anxiety has found that the career decision-making difficulties of college students in local undergraduate colleges and universities are generally at a moderate to high level<sup>[3]</sup>. Junior and senior students showed ‘some anxiety’ about employment<sup>[4]</sup>. There are few studies on the relationship between college students’ career decision-making difficulties and employment anxiety. Li Jiagen<sup>[5]</sup> concluded that there is a positive correlation between career decision-making difficulties and employment anxiety among graduates of some double first-class colleges and universities. However, with the continuous expansion of colleges and universities, the employment market is in the state of imbalance between supply and demand, and the gap between the undergraduate education resources of ‘non-dual’ colleges and universities and double first-class colleges and universities has led to the uneven distribution of employment resources, and a large number of high-quality employment opportunities are tilted to the graduates of double first-class colleges and universities. Undergraduates of ‘Non-Double’ universities often face greater pressure when seeking jobs during the graduation season<sup>[6]</sup>.

To sum up, this paper takes a ‘Non-Double’ university in Shaanxi Province as an example to discuss the relationship between career decision-making difficulties and employment anxiety, and puts forward relevant suggestions to alleviate the degree of employment anxiety of such university students due to career decision-making difficulties.

## 2.Object and Methods

### 2.1 Object

In this study, from March 8, 2024 to March 15, 2024, stratified whole cluster sampling method was used to divide all the colleges of a comprehensive university in Shaanxi Province into 4 strata of liberal arts, science, engineering, arts and sports according to the types of majors, and 2 colleges were selected in each stratum respectively by using the method of random number table, and in each college, 2 or 3 classes were selected by the method of convenience sampling, and all the fourth-year Undergraduate students as the survey object for the questionnaire survey, a total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, and 333 valid questionnaires were recovered, with an effective recovery rate of 83.25%. The survey was conducted anonymously and informed consent was obtained from the students.

### 2.2 Tools

#### 2.2.1 General information questionnaire

The general information questionnaire includes gender, major, whether they have found a job, whether they are an only child, and where their family lives. From Table 1, it can be seen that there are more female students than male students, accounting for 71% of the total number of investigators, this is because the subject institutions belong to the textile and clothing universities, female students accounted for a larger proportion and the largest number of arts and sports, in which the arts and sports students accounted for 57% of the total number of subjects, followed by engineering and liberal arts, accounting for 22% and 16% respectively, and the science subjects have the smallest number of students, accounting for only 5% of the total number of investigators. In terms of work status, the proportion of students who have not found a job is 38%, it can be seen that university graduates are facing difficulties in employment. In terms of family residence, there were 187 urban university students, accounting for 56 percent, and 146 rural university students, accounting for 44 percent of the total. Of these, 100 were only children and 233 were not, accounting for 30 percent and 70 percent of the total respectively.

*Table 1 Basic information about participants (n=333)*

demographic variables	number	proportion ( % )
gender		
Male	97	29
Female	236	71
major		

demographic variables	number	proportion ( % )
Liberal arts	54	16
Science	18	5
Engineering	73	22
Arts and sports	188	57
Whether they have found a job		
Yes	206	62
No	127	38
whether they are an only child		
Yes	100	30
No	233	70
where their family lives		
Urban	187	56
Rural	146	44

### 2.2.2 Career Decision-making Difficulties Questionnaire, CDDQ<sup>[7]</sup>

The Career Decision-making Difficulty Questionnaire developed by Li Na was used to measure the career decision difficulty of university graduates. The questionnaire consists of 35 items, divided into three sub-scales: lack of preparation, difficulty in information exploration, and multiple conflicts and contradictions. The questionnaire uses a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). Score range: When the total score for career decision-making difficulties exceeds 100, the level of career decision-making difficulties is considered high. The higher the score, the greater the difficulties an individual faces in the career selection process<sup>[7]</sup>. In the Career Decision-Making Difficulty Scale, the sub-scales for lack of preparation ( $\alpha = 0.907$ ), difficulty in information exploration ( $\alpha = 0.862$ ), and multiple conflicts and contradictions ( $\alpha = 0.906$ ) all exhibit good reliability. The overall scale ( $\alpha = 0.958$ ) also demonstrates good reliability.

### 2.2.3 Employment Anxiety Questionnaire, EAQ<sup>[8]</sup>

The questionnaire developed by Ren Huajuan in 2010 on university students' employment anxiety was used to measure employment anxiety among university students. The questionnaire consists of 15 items, divided into two sub-scales: physiological and behavioural aspects of employment anxiety and subjective perceptions of employment anxiety. It demonstrates good reliability ( $\alpha = 0.963$ ). The questionnaire uses a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 4 (completely agree). Scores are interpreted as follows: scores below 23 indicate low anxiety; scores between 23 and 38 indicate moderate anxiety; scores above 38 indicate severe anxiety. Higher scores indicate higher levels of employment anxiety<sup>[8]</sup>.

## 2.3 Statistical Analysis

Data were entered using Excel software and analysed using SPSS 23.0 software, including descriptive statistical analysis and Pearson correlation analysis to examine the correlation between the total score and each dimension of employment anxiety and the difficulty of career decision-making and each sub-scale. Using the dimensions and total score of employment anxiety as dependent variables, the sub-scales and total score of career decision-making difficulties as independent variables, and general demographic information as control variables, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. The statistical significance level was set at  $\alpha = 0.05$ .

### 3.Results

#### 3.1 Descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistical analysis results of the scores for each factor related to career decision-making difficulties among college students are shown in Table 2. As shown in Table 2, the total score for career decision-making difficulties was 106.20 points, which is higher than 100.00 points, indicating that college students' career decision-making difficulties are generally at a relatively high level; The scores for the three sub-scales: lack of preparation, difficulty in information exploration, and conflicts with multiple parties—were 35.77, 36.42, and 34.03, respectively, all exceeding 30.00 points. This suggests that the primary challenges university students face in career selection include insufficient career-related preparation, limited access to career-related information channels, and conflicts or disagreements with family members and friends during the decision-making process<sup>[7]</sup>.

*Table 2 Descriptive statistical analysis of career decision-making difficulties among college students (n=333)*

	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Lack of preparation	35.77	9.13
Difficulty in information exploration	36.42	8.23
Multiple conflicts and contradictions	34.03	8.65
Total table	106.20	24.54

The descriptive statistical analysis results of university students' employment anxiety scores are shown in Table 3. As shown in Table 3, the participants' total employment anxiety score was 35.62, ranging from 23 to 38, indicating that the employment anxiety level of graduates from this university is moderate<sup>[8]</sup>. This means that university graduates from this institution may experience physiological reactions such as dizziness, nausea, poor sleep quality, loss of appetite, inability to concentrate on a task, irritability, and constipation when seeking employment. Additionally, subjectively, they may feel overwhelmed, anxious, irritable, confused, and mentally disorganised when thinking about employment.

*Table 3 Descriptive statistical analysis of employment anxiety among college students (n=333)*

	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
Total employment anxiety score	35.62	11.55
Physiological behaviour related to employment anxiety	17.40	6.59
Subjective feelings related to employment anxiety	18.22	5.44

#### 3.2 Variable correlation analysis

The results of the person-related analysis are shown in Table 4. From the perspective of the total score of the career decision-making difficulty questionnaire and the total anxiety score and its various dimensions, the total score of career decision-making difficulty was positively correlated with the physiological behaviour, subjective feelings, and total anxiety score of employment anxiety ( $P < 0.01$ ). When examining the relationship between the sub-questionnaires of career decision-making difficulties and the total score of employment anxiety as well as its various dimensions, lack of preparation was positively correlated with the total score of employment anxiety, physiological behaviour of employment anxiety, and subjective feelings of employment anxiety; Information exploration difficulties are positively correlated with employment anxiety physiological behaviour and employment anxiety subjective feelings; Multiple conflicts and contradictions are positively correlated with the total employment anxiety score, employment anxiety physiological behaviour, and employment anxiety subjective feelings ( $P < 0.01$ ). This indicates that career decision-making difficulties among university students are related to employment anxiety. By preparing adequately for job searches, gaining a comprehensive understanding of career information, and resolving conflicts and contradictions, it is possible to reduce the level of employment anxiety among university students.

Table 4 Correlation coefficient between career decision-making difficulties and employment anxiety among college students  
( $n = 333$ )

	Physiological behaviour related to employment anxiety	Subjective feelings related to employment anxiety	Total employment anxiety score
Lack of preparation for the questionnaire	0.589**	0.567**	0.604**
Information Exploration Difficulty Questionnaire	0.529**	0.529**	0.551**
Multiple conflicts and contradictions questionnaire	0.592**	0.597**	0.620**
Total score for career decision-making difficulties	0.605**	0.599**	0.628**

\* $P < 0.05$ , \*\* $P < 0.01$

### 3.3 The Relationship Between Career Decision Difficulties and Employment Anxiety

Using the dimensions and total scores of employment anxiety as independent variables, and the general characteristics of the study subjects (gender: 1=male, 0= female; whether an only child: 1=yes, 0=no; major: 1=liberal arts, 2=science, 3=engineering, 4=arts and sports; residential area 1=urban, 0=rural) as control variables; lack of preparation, difficulty in information exploration, multiple conflicts and contradictions, and total scores for career decision-making difficulties were all entered as independent variables in their original values for multiple linear regression analysis. Model 1 tested the relationship between total scores for career decision-making difficulties and physiological and behavioral aspects of employment anxiety; Model 2 tested the influence of each dimension of career decision-making difficulties (lack of preparation, difficulty in information exploration, and multiple conflicts and contradictions) on physiological and behaviour aspects of employment anxiety; Model 3 examines the relationship between the total score of career decision-making difficulties and employment anxiety; Model 4 examines the impact of lack of preparation, difficulty in information exploration, and multiple conflicts on the subjective experience of employment anxiety; Model 5 examines the relationship between the total score of career decision-making difficulties and the total score of employment anxiety; Model 6 examines the impact of lack of preparation, difficulty in information exploration, and multiple conflicts on the total score of employment anxiety. The results indicate that lack of preparation, multiple conflicts and contradictions, whether one is an only child, whether one has found employment, and the type of major have a certain impact on employment anxiety.

As shown in Table 5, the total score for career decision-making difficulties is positively correlated with the physiological behaviour of employment anxiety, the subjective experience of employment anxiety, and the total score for employment anxiety, with regression coefficients of 0.63, 0.61, and 0.59, respectively ( $P < 0.01$ ). The higher the total score for career decision-making difficulties, the higher the level of employment anxiety.

From the perspective of various dimensions of career decision-making difficulties, there is a positive correlation between lack of preparation, multiple conflicts and contradictions, physiological behaviors associated with employment anxiety, subjective feelings of employment anxiety, and total employment anxiety scores. That is, when looking for a job, the less prepared one is, the higher the level of employment anxiety; when faced with career choices, the more conflicts and contradictions one encounters, the higher the level of employment anxiety.

In addition, from the perspective of personal characteristics, whether one is an only child, whether one has found a job, and the type of major all have a significant impact on employment anxiety physiological behaviour, subjective feelings of employment anxiety, and total employment anxiety scores. Among the types of majors, arts and sports students have higher levels of employment anxiety than liberal arts graduates.

Table 5 Multivariate linear regression analysis of career decision-making difficulties and employment anxiety among college students ( $n = 333$ )

	Physiological behaviour related to employment anxiety		Subjective feelings related to employment anxiety		Total employment anxiety score	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Total score for career decision-making difficulties	0.63**		0.61**		0.59**	
Lack of preparation		0.27**		0.31**		0.21**
Information Exploration Difficulty		-0.01		-0.01		-0.00
Multiple conflicts and contradictions		0.40**		0.34**		0.42**
gender	-0.02	-0.03	-0.01	-0.00	-0.06	-0.06
Whether an only child	-0.10*	-0.11*	-0.10*	-0.11*	-0.10*	-0.11*
Whether has found an job	-0.15**	-0.16**	-0.11**	-0.13**	-0.18**	-0.19**
major ( liberal arts as a reference )						
Science	0.05	0.047	0.07	0.07	0.03	0.02
Engineering	0.00	0.00	0.04	0.03	0.04	0.04
Arts and sports	0.12*	0.12*	0.13*	0.13*	0.10	0.10
Residence	0.03	0.04	0.07	0.07	0.01	0.01
R <sup>2</sup>	0.45	0.46	0.41	0.43	0.42	0.44
F	21.51	74.41	18.69	16.78	19.41	17.68

\*P < 0.05, \*\*P < 0.01

## 4. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that college students generally experience a high level of difficulty in making career decisions, which is consistent with the findings of domestic studies<sup>[9]</sup>. When faced with career decisions, college students lack preparation due to unclear self-identity and insufficient understanding of career information<sup>[10]</sup>; College students encounter difficulties in information exploration, which may be due to the significant impact of the economy on various industries, the time required for industry recovery, and the uncertainty of corporate hiring scales, leading to college students being unable to obtain sufficient and accurate social environment information. Additionally, the job search process requires the collection of a large amount of information, which inevitably results in the acquisition of a certain amount of unreliable information, hindering college students from making decisions<sup>[11]</sup>. In terms of conflicting interests, differences in opinions with family members are also a reason why graduates face difficulties in career decision-making.

The employment anxiety of graduates from this university is at a moderate level, indicating that university graduates generally suffer from employment anxiety<sup>[12-14]</sup>. This study was conducted from March to May, which is the peak season for spring employment. Therefore, the emotional experiences of university students during this period were the most direct and authentic.

Career decision-making difficulties are positively correlated with employment anxiety. The more career decision-making difficulties one faces, the higher the level of anxiety<sup>[15]</sup>. When seeking employment, the less prepared one is, the higher the level of employment anxiety<sup>[16]</sup>. This is because university students often lack a proper understanding of themselves and their careers, and have not adequately planned their career paths, leading to anxiety in the highly competitive job market<sup>[17]</sup>; When facing career choices, the more conflicts and contradictions encountered, the higher the level of employment anxiety. China has traditionally placed a strong emphasis on family values, with major decisions often being made based on the opinions of parents and elders, which places significant psychological pressure on university students during their job search<sup>[18]</sup>. Some parents disregard their children's interests, hobbies, strengths, and academic specialisations, instead imposing their own



career aspirations on their children, which is another contributing factor to employment anxiety among university students<sup>[19]</sup>. This study also found that there were no significant gender differences in employment anxiety. A possible explanation is that with the development of China's economy and society, the status of women has continued to improve, and ordinary families have increasingly valued education and support for women. Women's professional abilities are in no way inferior to those of men, and in many fields, they even outperform men<sup>[20]</sup>.

In summary, regarding the difficulties graduates face in making career decisions, from the perspective of higher education institutions, it is essential to actively offer career planning courses and lectures addressing employment-related issues. These initiatives not only assist students in overcoming decision-making challenges but also address specific problems encountered during the career decision-making process, thereby guiding students to efficiently and smoothly complete their career decisions. From the graduates' perspective, it is important to prepare thoroughly before job hunting, such as through reasonable career planning and actively seeking information related to their chosen field. To alleviate graduates' employment anxiety, universities should conduct employment mental health education for fourth-year students, carry out employment mental health surveys to understand graduates' employment mental health status, and promptly provide psychological counselling for students with employment-related mental health issues, enabling graduates to actively address employment anxiety.

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