



Examining the Relationship between Existential Anxiety, Future Orientation, and Career Indecision among Young Adults

¹**Lipika Talwar**, *M.A. Clinical Psychology Student, Amity Institute of Psychology and Allied Sciences, Amity University Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India*

Lipikatalwar4@gmail.com

²**Dr. Tamanna Saxena**, *Associate Professor, Amity Institute of Psychology and Allied Sciences, Amity University Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India*

Tsaxena@amity.edu

Abstract: Young adulthood is a crucial developmental period that is characterized by important career-related decisions, growing responsibilities, and identity exploration. While cognitive and informational frameworks have historically been used to analyze career indecision, fundamental emotional and existential issues that could affect this process have received less attention. The purpose of this study was to investigate the connection between young adults' existential angst, future orientation, and career indecision. The research design used was quantitative correlational. Using convenience sampling, 215 young individuals between the ages of 18 and 29 who were enrolled in colleges and institutions made up the sample. To measure levels of existential dread, future orientation, and career decision-making challenges, standardized psychological tests were used. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation analysis. The results showed that existential anxiety and vocational hesitation had a moderately positive, statistically significant connection ($r = .267, p < .01$), suggesting that people with higher existential concerns had a harder time choosing a career. However, there was no significant correlation between existential distress and future orientation ($r = -.016, p > .05$) or between future orientation and career hesitation ($r = -.047, p > .05$). According to the findings, job indecision may be more influenced by emotional and identity-related issues than by merely cognitive future planning. Therefore, rather than being the result of a lack of knowledge or planning skills, young adults' career

troubles may be a reflection of deeper issues with meaning, responsibility, and life direction. The study emphasizes the significance of treating emotional well-being within career counseling methods and advances the convergence of existential psychology and career development theory.

Keywords: *Existential Anxiety, Future Orientation, Career Indecision, Young Adults*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Conceptual Framework

Most people agree that one of the most important stages of human development is young adulthood. It is a time of inquiry, introspection, and significant life changes. People are supposed to make significant choices about their schooling, careers, relationships, and sense of self during this phase. Their feeling of purpose, psychological health, and future life path are all significantly influenced by these choices (Arnett, 2015; Erikson, 1968). Young adulthood, however, is also a period of psychological strain, emotional weakness, and uncertainty.

When making plans for the future, young adults encounter more and more difficulties in the current social and economic environment. Career planning is now more complicated than ever due to social expectations, financial instability, unemployment, fierce academic competition, and rapid technological advancements (Creed et al., 2016; Savickas, 2013). Young adults frequently face pressure to perform well and make "perfect" decisions, which breeds fear of failing. As a result, many people struggle to identify their job goals and face mental anguish, stress, and confusion (Ginevra et al., 2018).

Existential anxiety is one of the major psychological feelings that occur throughout this phase. Existential anxiety is a profound type of anxiety that results from basic human worries about identity, freedom, responsibility, loneliness, meaning in life, and future uncertainty (May, 1983; Yalom, 1980). In contrast to general anxiety, existential anxiety is linked to more universal concerns about one's existence and purpose rather than being restricted to particular circumstances. As they consider who they are, what they want to become, and if their decisions will result in a meaningful life, young adults often suffer from existential anxiety (Arnett, 2015; Van Deurzen, 2012).

Future orientation is another significant factor affecting young adults. The degree to which people consider, prepare for, and react emotionally to future occurrences is known as future orientation (Nurmi, 1991). It encompasses sentiments like motivation, hope, optimism, fear, and uncertainty about the future. While people with weak or negative future orientation may feel powerless, avoid long-term decisions, and experience uncertainty, those with strong

future orientation are more likely to create objectives, plan, and stay motivated (Seginer, 2009; Steinberg et al., 2009).

Career indecision is one of the main effects of these psychological processes. According to Osipow (1999) and Gati and Levin (2014), career indecision is the inability to make decisions about one's job because of unclear thinking, low self-esteem, emotional turmoil, or competing interests. One of the most prevalent issues that students and young adults experience is career indecision. According to Kelly and Lee (2002) and Di Fabio and Palazzeschi (2015), it frequently results in anxiety, academic stress, discontent, and a delay in personal development. According to Savickas (2013), career hesitation is a reflection of fundamental psychological issues pertaining to identity formation and emotional well-being rather than just being a practical problem.

Thus, there is a strong correlation between existential anxiety, future orientation, and job indecision. Young adults may find it more challenging to make employment selections if existential anxiety has a detrimental impact on their outlook on the future (Yalom, 1980; Santilli et al., 2017). Gaining an understanding of this link might enhance vocational counseling techniques and offer insightful information about the emotional and cognitive experiences of young adults.

1.2 Problem Statement

Even though career planning is becoming more and more important in young adulthood, many young people still struggle greatly to make decisions about their careers (Gati & Levin, 2014). Particularly among college students and new graduates who are expected to make long-term professional commitments at an early age, career hesitation has become more prevalent (Xu & Bhang, 2019).

According to Brown and Lent (2013), traditional career counseling approaches mostly concentrate on interests, skills, academic performance, and employment options. Even though these elements are significant, they frequently overlook more profound psychological aspects including existential issues and emotional health. Reasonable decision-making may be hampered by the anxiety that many young adults face in relation to meaning, purpose, identity, and fear of failure (May, 1983; Van Deurzen, 2012).

Feelings of uncertainty, despair, and a dread of making poor decisions can result from existential anxiety (Yalom, 1980). However, young adults who lack a strong sense of future orientation may find it difficult to envision long-term objectives and may be unsure about their life's path (Nurmi, 1991; Seginer, 2009). Despite their potential to play a considerable role in

career indecision, these psychological factors have not received enough empirical attention (Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2015).

Furthermore, young adults in India are subject to extra pressures such social standards, family expectations, and competitive academic settings (Misra & McKean, 2000). Despite these facts, little study has looked at how existential anxiety and future orientation interact to affect young adults in India who are unsure about their careers.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study's primary goal is to investigate the connection between young adults' job hesitation, future direction, and existential anxiety (Santilli et al., 2017; Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2015). In particular, the study seeks to:

- Evaluate young individuals' degrees of existential angst, future orientation, and career indecision.
- Examine the connection between job indecision and existential discomfort.
- Examine the connection between professional indecision and future orientation.
- Examine if the association between existential angst and career indecision is mediated by future orientation.

The study aims to emphasize emotional aspects impacting job decision-making and offer a deeper psychological understanding of work-related issues.

1.4 Research Questions

1. Do young individuals' existential anxiety and career indecision have a substantial correlation?
2. Does career indecision have a substantial relationship with future orientation?
3. Does existential anxiety have a big impact on how people look to the future?
4. Is the relationship between existential angst and career indecision mediated by future orientation?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study theoretically combines ideas from career psychology and existential psychology to provide a comprehensive framework for comprehending professional hesitation (Yalom, 1980; Savickas, 2013). By highlighting existential dread as a crucial psychological component affecting career growth, it adds to the body of current knowledge.

In practice, the results could help educators, career counselors, and mental health specialists identify emotional obstacles to choosing a vocation (Brown & Lent, 2013). Interventions can be developed to lessen career indecision and improve psychological well-being by addressing existential concerns and bolstering future orientation (Santilli et al., 2017).

1.6 Overview of the Study

The current study uses a quantitative research approach to investigate the connections between career indecision, future orientation, and existential angst. Young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 make up the sample. In addition to statistical methods like regression, correlation, and mediation analysis, standardized psychological instruments are utilized (Field, 2018).

1.7 Definition of Terms

Existential Anxiety

A profound psychological state known as existential anxiety develops as people realize the basic truths of life, including personal responsibility, freedom of choice, loneliness, uncertainty, and death's inevitable outcome. In contrast to situational anxiety, which is brought on by particular occurrences, existential anxiety results from more in-depth contemplations of one's identity, purpose, and life's meaning (May, 1983; Yalom, 1980).

This anxiety frequently gets worse for young adults after significant life changes, especially when choosing a career. People are required to identify their identities and aspirations at this point. Feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, and internal conflict might result from realizing that decisions in life are self-directed and that poor choices may have long-lasting effects.

Future Orientation

The psychological propensity to consider, predict, and get ready for future events is known as future orientation (Nurmi, 1991). It deals with how people establish goals, envision their future, and react emotionally to potential outcomes. People with a strong future orientation are better able to link their current behaviors to their long-term effects, which encourages goal-directed conduct and structured planning.

Future orientation is a key factor in determining academic decisions, career preparation, and personal growth in young adulthood. People are more inclined to make strategic decisions and persevere through difficulties if they have a clear vision of their future.

Career Indecision

The incapacity or difficulty to select, commit to, or carry out a career decision is referred to as career indecision (Osipow, 1999). It involves more than just a delay in decision-making; it frequently entails emotional distress, ambiguity, and cognitive confusion about the various professional choices that are available. Because people are simultaneously examining their identities, skills, and prospects, career indecision is more prevalent during emerging

adulthood. Lack of knowledge, outside influences, and internal uncertainties might make it more difficult to make a final professional decision.

Young Adults

People between the ages of 18 and 29 are referred to as young adults for the purposes of this study. According to Arnett (2015), this developmental stage is known as "emerging adulthood" and is marked by self-discovery, identity exploration, and instability. People go from youth to adulthood at this phase, take on more responsibility, and make important life decisions about relationships, work, and education. Because decisions taken during this time frequently have an impact on long-term professional paths, it is a crucial time for career formation. The study's definition of young adults includes people who are just starting their professions or are presently enrolled in college.

2. Review of Literature

Eken and Kaya (2025) examined the connections between young adults' narcissistic personality traits, existential distress, insight, and life's purpose. A sample of 385 people (144 males and 241 women) who were at least 18 years old were included in the study. Data were examined using serial mediation analysis utilizing the Process Macro in SPSS, and standardized measures of insight, meaning in life, existential distress, and narcissistic tendencies were given out. The findings showed that the association between insight and narcissistic personality traits was mediated by existential anxiety and meaning in life, with higher insight being linked to lower existential anxiety and greater meaning in life. The results demonstrate the applicability of existential theory to personality research by indicating that existential variables are important in comprehending the relationship between individual psychological processes and personality traits.

Juneja & Sethi (2025) investigated the relationship between higher education students' psychological health and career anxiety and indecision. A sample of 200 undergraduate and graduate students, ages 18 to 25, participated in the study. The data was analyzed using statistical methods such as multiple regression, Pearson correlation, and t-tests. Overall psychological well-being and career anxiety did not significantly differ between undergraduates and postgraduates, according to the data; nevertheless, students reported far higher levels of career hesitation. Furthermore, it was discovered that important aspects of psychological well-being, specifically self-acceptance, life purpose, and personal development, were inversely correlated with both professional anxiety and career indecision. The results emphasize how crucial it is for career counseling programs to address emotional variables.

Müceldili, Tatar, and Erdil (2025) investigated the influence of purpose in life and career decision self-efficacy in undergraduate students' career anxiety as a hindrance to life happiness. 312 undergraduate students participated in the quantitative study, which tested the links between career anxiety, life satisfaction, meaning in life, and self-efficacy using structural equation modeling. The findings indicated that life pleasure was positively correlated with meaning in life while career anxiety was negatively correlated with meaning in life. Furthermore, the association between professional anxiety and life purpose was reduced by career decision self-efficacy, indicating that greater self-efficacy may mitigate the negative impacts of anxiety on students' wellbeing. These results demonstrate how psychological resources like self-efficacy and purpose in life affect how career anxiety affects people's lives.

Sulehria (2025) used a correlational survey approach to examine the association between career anxiety and career indecision among 200 undergraduate students. Students with higher levels of profession-related anxiety had more trouble making career decisions, according to statistical research, which showed a substantial positive association between career anxiety and career indecision. The study underlined how crucial psychological assistance is to helping people make wise career decisions.

Alshehri, Alturkestani, Hijan, Almalki, Alobaidi, Almufti, Baduwailan, Butt, Alghamdi, Al Zaben, Koenig, Tayeb, and Abdulghaffar (2024) investigated the prevalence of existential anxiety and how it relates to stress, depression, and general anxiety in Saudi Arabian undergraduate students. Eight hundred and eleven undergraduate students from three major institutions participated in this cross-sectional survey. The Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale and a modified existential anxiety scale were filled out by the participants. According to statistical studies, scores were substantially connected with feelings of stress, despair, and general anxiety, and 71.1% of students displayed symptoms of existential anxiety. The results highlight the need for more research and supportive interventions for college students, as well as the high prevalence of existential anxiety in this population and its strong correlations with other types of psychological distress.

3. Methodology

3.1 *Aim of the Study*

Examining the connection between young adults' existential angst, future orientation, and job indecision is the main goal of this study. The goal of the study is to comprehend how worries about the purpose of life and the future affect decisions about careers.

3.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To gauge young adults' existential distress levels.
2. To gauge young individuals' degree of future orientation.
3. To gauge young individuals' degree of career hesitation.
4. To investigate the connection between professional indecision and existential anxiety.
5. To investigate the connection between professional indecision and future orientation.
6. To investigate how existential anxiety and future orientation work together to predict career indecision.

3.3 Hypothesis

1. There will be significant relationship between existential anxiety and future orientation among young adults.
2. There will be significant relationship between existential anxiety and career indecision among young adults.
3. There will be significant relationship between future orientation and career indecision among young adults.

3.4 Research Design

The present study follows a quantitative, correlational research design. This design is suitable as the study aims to examine the nature and strength of relationships between psychological variables without manipulating them.

3.5 Sample

The sample consisted of 200 young adults (both males and females) aged between 18 to 29 years. Participants were selected from various colleges and universities using the convenience sampling technique. Students currently enrolled in undergraduate or postgraduate courses were included in the study.

Inclusion Criteria

- Age between 18–29 years
- Willing to participate voluntarily

Exclusion Criteria

- Individuals with diagnosed severe mental illness
- Individuals above 30 years of age

3.6 Tools Used

The following standardized tools were used for data collection:

Existential Anxiety Questionnaire (EAQ): Developed by Weems et al., this scale measures anxiety related to death, meaninglessness, isolation, and identity.

Future Orientation Scale (FOS): Developed by Steinberg et al., this scale assesses individuals' thoughts, planning, and expectations about the future.

Career Decision making difficulty questionnaire (CDDQ): Developed by Gati, this scale measures the level of difficulty experienced in making career-related decisions.

(All tools use Likert-type responses and have adequate reliability and validity.)

3.7 Procedure

Prior to data collection, permission was acquired from the relevant institutions. The goal of the study was explained to the participants, and their informed consent was obtained. Both in-person and online versions were used to administer the questionnaires. Participants received assurances that their answers would be kept private and were urged to answer truthfully. Statistical methods like multiple regression analysis and Pearson's correlation were used to assess and examine the gathered data.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The following ethical principles were strictly followed:

- **Informed Consent:** Participants were informed about the nature and purpose of the study before participation.
- **Confidentiality:** Personal information was not disclosed and responses were kept anonymous.
- **Voluntary Participation:** Participants had the right to withdraw at any stage without any penalty.
- **Non-harmful Procedure:** The study did not involve any physical or psychological harm.
- **Data Protection:** Collected data was used strictly for academic purposes only.

4. Result

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Existential Anxiety	215	0	13	5.87	2.749
Future Orientation	215	0	80	63.20	12.040
Career Decision	215	62	504	253.07	92.487
Valid N (listwise)	215				

The descriptive statistics for the study variables based on 215 individuals are shown in table 1. With ratings ranging from 0 to 13, existential anxiety had a mean score of 5.87 (SD = 2.75), suggesting a moderate level among individuals. The comparatively high mean score of

63.20 (SD = 12.04) for future orientation indicated that the majority of individuals had strong future-oriented thinking. The mean score for career decision was 253.07 (SD = 92.49), with a wide range (62–504), indicating significant variation in the participants' degrees of career decision. There were no missing data found (Valid N = 215).

Table 2. *Correlation between existential anxiety and future orientation*

S. No	Variable	N	r	Sig.
1	Existential Anxiety	215	-.016	.813
2	Future Orientation	215		

Hypothesis: There will be significant relationship between existential anxiety and future orientation among young adults

The association between existential anxiety and future orientation was investigated using Pearson's correlation analysis. The findings showed that existential distress and future orientation had a very small negative connection ($r = -.016$, $p = .813$). The link is not statistically significant because the p-value is higher than .05. This implies that among the participants in the current study, existential anxiety is not substantially correlated with future orientation. - Not proved

Table 3. *Correlation between existential anxiety and career indecision*

S. No	Variable	N	r	Sig.
1	Existential Anxiety	215	.267	.000
2	Career Indecision	215		

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis: There will be significant relationship between existential anxiety and career indecision among young adults.

The results of Pearson's correlation analysis showed that existential anxiety and career choice were positively correlated ($r = .267$, $p < .001$). At the 0.01 level, the p-value shows that the association is statistically significant. This implies that participants' levels of vocational decision-making are substantially correlated with their greater levels of existential anxiety. There is a significant but weak association between the two variables, as indicated by the modest to moderate correlation strength. - Proved

Table 4. *Correlation between future orientation and career decision*

S. No	Variable	N	r	Sig.
1	Future Orientation	215	-.047	.491
2	Career Indecision	215		

Hypothesis: There will be significant relationship between future orientation and career indecision among young adults.

The association between young adults' career indecision and future orientation was investigated using Pearson's correlation analysis. The results showed that the two variables had a very weak negative association ($r = -0.047$, $p = .491$). The link is not statistically significant because the p-value is higher than .05. This implies that future orientation does not significantly correlate with young adults' job indecision in the current study. Consequently, there is no evidence to support the notion that future direction and career indecision will be significantly correlated. - Not proved.

Table 5. *Correlation between existential anxiety, future orientation and career decision*

		Existential Anxiety	Future Orientation	Career Decision
Existential Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	-.016	.267**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.813	.000
	N	215	215	215
Future Orientation	Pearson Correlation	-.016	1	-.047
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.813		.491
	N	215	215	215
Career Decision	Pearson Correlation	.267**	-.047	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.491	
	N	215	215	215

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the connection between young adults' existential angst, future orientation, and career indecision. A total of 215 participants were included in the study, and data were collected using standardized psychological scales measuring existential anxiety, future orientation, and career decision/indecision. The objective was to understand how deeper existential concerns and future-focused thinking influence career-related decision-making during young adulthood.

Descriptive statistics revealed that participants reported a moderate level of existential anxiety ($M = 5.87$), relatively high future orientation ($M = 63.20$), and considerable variability in career decision levels ($M = 253.07$). This suggests that while many young adults actively

think about and plan for their future, they may still experience uncertainty and internal conflict regarding their career paths.

The results of the correlation analysis were not entirely consistent. First, there was no statistically significant correlation between future orientation and existential anxiety ($r = -.016$, $p > .05$). This suggests that a young adult's propensity to reflect on and make plans for the future is neither diminished nor enhanced by existential worries. It seems that people can have future-focused ambitions and feel unsure about their life's purpose and direction at the same time. This demonstrates the complexity of psychological functioning throughout the transition to adulthood, when existential questioning and internal misgivings can coexist with future preparation.

Second, existential distress and career indecision were found to be significantly positively correlated ($r = .267$, $p < .001$). According to this research, young adults who suffer from higher levels of existential anxiety also frequently express more difficulties or conflict while deciding on a vocation. Selecting a career is not just a pragmatic option; it is strongly related to one's identity, purpose, sense of duty, and personal significance. Indecision or confusion about professional choices may worsen when people grapple with existential issues like "What is my purpose?" or "Am I choosing the right path?" Therefore, existential worry seems to have a significant psychological impact on young people's career-related challenges.

Third, there was no statistically significant correlation between professional indecision and future orientation ($r = -.047$, $p > .05$). The results did not corroborate the hypothesis that those who are more future-focused would be less indecisive about their careers. Career uncertainty may not be resolved by merely considering or preparing for the future. Other elements like self-efficacy, identity clarity, mental stability, or social support might have a greater impact on how people choose their careers.

Overall, the findings imply that existential concern rather than future orientation is more closely associated with career indecision. While planning for the future is crucial, disputes pertaining to one's work in early adulthood may be more significantly impacted by deeper psychological issues with meaning, accountability, and identity. These results emphasize how crucial it is to address existential topics in psychological therapies and career guidance. Encouraging young individuals to investigate meaning, purpose, and personal values may help them make better decisions and lessen professional indecision.

The study does have some drawbacks, though. The cross-sectional design restricts inferences on causality, and the use of self-report measures may induce response bias. The sample's generalizability may have been limited by its restriction to young adults in a particular

setting. Longitudinal designs may be used in future studies to investigate the long-term effects of existential anxiety on professional advancement. To obtain a more thorough knowledge of professional hesitation, additional psychological factors such as resilience, identity development, career self-efficacy, and perceived social support could be investigated.

Notwithstanding these drawbacks, the study adds to the expanding corpus of research on the impact of psychology on professional growth. The results highlight the fact that young adults' career dilemma is not only a practical problem but also closely related to existential and emotional experiences. Resolving these fundamental issues could promote more positive professional advancement and psychological health in general.

5.1 Conclusion of Discussion

In summary, the study demonstrates that existential anxiety is significantly associated with career decision difficulties among young adults, whereas future orientation does not show a significant relationship with either career decision or existential anxiety. These findings emphasize the importance of understanding the emotional and identity-related aspects of career development.

Supporting young adults in managing existential concerns and strengthening their sense of meaning may help them approach career decisions with greater clarity and confidence.

6. Conclusion

The goal of the current study was to investigate the relationship between young adults' professional indecision and existential anxiety and future direction. The results shed crucial light on the psychological mechanisms that underlie choosing a career during this life change.

According to the findings, existential distress and career indecision are significantly and favorably correlated. Young adults who struggle to commit to a career are more likely to have higher levels of anxiety about their identity, fear of making decisions that cannot be changed, and responsibility for their future. According to this research, choosing a career may represent deeper emotional and existential issues rather than just being a practical or informational issue.

Identity formation and career choices in early adulthood are intimately related. Selecting a career frequently represents establishing one's values, social role, and future. For many who suffer from existential discomfort, this duty could be too much to bear. Hesitancy and bewilderment can be brought on by worries about personal adequacy, uncertainty about life's purpose, and dread of making the "wrong" decision. Therefore, existential issues seem to impede confidence and clarity when making career decisions.

On the other hand, there was no statistically significant correlation between career indecision and future orientation. Planning and goal-setting are common behaviors of future-oriented people, but in this group, these inclinations did not always translate into easier decision-making. According to this research, job indecision may not be resolved by cognitive planning alone if emotional stability and identity clarity are lacking.

Furthermore, the lack of a substantial correlation between existential worry and future orientation suggests that existential worries may function independently of future-focused thinking. While contemplating and making plans for the future, a person may still be deeply unsure of their identity and purpose.

All things considered, the study emphasizes how critical it is to acknowledge career indecision as a psychologically complicated phenomena. Identity development, existential clarity, and emotional health seem to be key determinants of young people's work choices. People may approach professional decisions with more self-assurance, purpose, and psychological stability if these deeper issues are addressed.

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