



Hope, Resilience, and Career Anxiety in the Context of Examination-Related Uncertainty

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Abstract: Background: Competitive examination uncertainty can create career anxiety among students. Psychological resources such as hope and resilience may help students cope with uncertain career outcomes. **Objective:** The present study aimed to examine relationships among hope, resilience, and career uncertainty and anxiety, assess their predictive role, and examine gender differences. **Methodology:** A cross-sectional study was conducted among 76 students (38 females and 38 males). Hope was assessed through the Adult Hope Scale (pathway and agency subscales), while resilience was assessed with the Brief Resilience Scale, and Career Anxiety was assessed with the Career Uncertainty and Anxiety Questionnaire. Data were analyzed using Pearson's correlation, Welch's independent-samples t-test, and linear regression. **Results:** Agency was significantly and negatively correlated with career uncertainty and anxiety ($r = -.401, p < .001$), while pathway showed a non-significant negative association ($r = -.174$). Resilience was negatively correlated with career uncertainty and anxiety ($r = -.307, p < .01$) and positively associated with pathway and agency. The regression model was significant, $F(3,72) = 6.87, p < .001$, explaining 22.3% of the variance. Agency and resilience predicted lower career uncertainty and anxiety. No significant gender differences were found.

Conclusion and Suggestions: The findings suggest that agency and resilience may serve as important psychological resources in managing career uncertainty and anxiety. Career counselling programmes should incorporate goal-setting, coping-skills training, resilience-building, and flexible career planning. Future research should use larger and more diverse samples and longitudinal or intervention-based designs to further examine these relationships.

Keywords: *Hope, Resilience, Career Anxiety, Career Uncertainty, Agency, Pathway Thinking, Competitive Examinations, Students.*

1. Introduction

“I am not what happened to me. I am what I choose to become.”

- Carl Jung

In India, exams are not just tests of knowledge; they are life-changing events. From the IIT-JEE and NEET to the UPSC and state-level entrance tests, a single exam result can shape a student’s future, family pride, and social standing. This pressure starts early and stays constant. Parents invest heavily in coaching classes, students spend years preparing, and society often measures success by which college or job one secures. In this environment, failure is not seen as a setback but as a personal defeat. The uncertainty surrounding these high-stakes exams creates immense stress, making the journey emotionally exhausting for millions of young Indians.

However, the immense pressure to succeed often weakens these qualities and gives rise to career anxiety. This is the constant fear that one wrong result will ruin everything, destroy career prospects, disappoint parents, and invite judgment from relatives and peers. This anxiety is worsened by the toxic habit of comparing oneself to others, the cousin who cracked the exam, the friend who got a top rank, or the neighbor’s child who seems to have it all. Such comparisons create a sense of worthlessness and panic, which can actually harm performance and mental health.

Pienyu et al. (2024) conducted a cross-sectional study of adolescents in Karnataka and found that most students experienced high academic stress, high perceived parental pressure, and moderate anxiety. Over 57% had low general well-being, indicating that exam stress significantly affects overall mental health.

Gupta et al. (2025) conducted research analyzing 80 suicide cases among IIT-JEE and NEET aspirants and found alarming trends: 81% of cases were in the 15-20 age group, 77% were male, and NEET aspirants accounted for 73% of cases. Hanging was the most common method (76%). This highlights the severe mental health impact of exam pressure.

In such a demanding setting, hope and resilience become essential for survival. Hope is not about blind optimism; it is about believing that hard work will pay off while remaining open to different paths. A hopeful student does not see a single exam as the end of the world. Instead, they focus on giving their best and remain flexible about what the future holds. This mindset keeps motivation alive, even when the competition feels overwhelming.

Resilience, on the other hand, is the ability to bounce back from disappointments. In India, where “dropping a year” is often looked down upon, resilience helps students cope with failure and try again. It is what allows a student to return to their studies after a poor mock test score or to handle the emotional weight of letting down family expectations. Resilience turns setbacks into learning experiences, rather than reasons to give up. A study conducted in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, examined the effects of goal-directed meditation on 16 college students over six months and reported significant increases in both resilience and hope scores (Singh & Modi, 2022). This indicates that resilience and hope can be developed through structured interventions.

1.1 Hope

“Hope can be related to expectancy theory, the idea that people will act if they think they will attain or achieve their goals by doing so” (Vroom, 1964). “Hope refers to future-referenced events that are wished for, have positive affect and have some cognitively perceived probability of occurrence” (Staats, 1989).

Leung et al. (2017) systematically reviewed 223 articles on hope, aspirations and resilience among children and adolescents. The review identified hope, future orientation, and resilience as important developmental strengths associated with positive youth development. Findings showed that personal, family, school, and community factors influence these constructs. Self-efficacy was consistently associated with greater future orientation and educational or career aspirations, while supportive parenting and positive school relationships fostered hope and resilience.

Circir et al. (2023) conducted a study on the predictive role of Hope, self-efficacy, and self-esteem on adolescents’ career anxiety. A sample of 253 adolescents (165 females and 88 males) was selected using convenience sampling. The Career Anxiety Scale, Dispositional Hope Scale, the Self-efficacy scale for children and the Rosenberg Self-esteem scale were used. Results showed significant negative relationships between career anxiety and hope, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. Collectively, these variables explained 46.1% of the variance in career anxiety, with self-efficacy emerging as the strongest predictor, followed by hope and self-esteem. The findings suggest that strengthening these positive psychological resources

may help reduce career anxiety among adolescents and support healthier career decision-making and development.

Konuk (2025) conducted a study on the role of Hope in university students' career transitions. The study highlighted that career transitions are often accompanied by uncertainty, anxiety, stress, and concerns regarding employment and professional identity. Hope, based on Snyder's Hope Theory, involves goal-directed thinking, pathways thinking, and agency thinking. The literature suggests that higher hope is associated with greater career adaptability, resilience, self-efficacy, and psychological well-being. Hope also helps students develop alternative strategies and remain motivated when facing career-related obstacles. Thus, hope may serve as an important psychological resource for managing career uncertainty and anxiety during major educational and professional transitions.

Richardson et al. (2025) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis examining the relationship between hope and anxiety across 129 studies. Drawing on Snyder's hope theory, which conceptualizes hope as a cognitive-motivational resource comprising pathways thinking and agency, the authors found moderate inverse associations between hope and trait anxiety cross-sectionally ($r = -0.36$) and longitudinally ($r = -0.27$). Hope demonstrated the strongest association with social anxiety ($r = -0.43$), followed by generalized anxiety ($r = -0.32$) and situation-specific anxiety ($r = -0.22$). Moderator analyses revealed consistent effects across gender and age groups, though effects were slightly weaker in mental health treatment-seeking samples. The findings position hope as a transdiagnostic resilience factor that may protect against anxiety, suggesting its potential as an intervention target in clinical settings.

1.2 Resilience

Wagnild and Young (1993) defined "resilience as moderating the negative effects of stress and promoting adjustment to challenging circumstances." Bonanno (2004) described resilience as the ability to maintain equilibrium in the face of unfavourable circumstances. "Resilience denotes the constellation of personality qualities that enables positive adaptation to adversity" (Luthar, 2006).

Lyons et al. (2015) examined career resilience as a psychological resource for managing career-related adversity and uncertainty. Their study investigated the relationships between career resilience, personality factors, self-evaluations, modern career orientations, and career satisfaction. The 1988 sample was used for the study. The findings indicated that emotional stability was positively associated with career resilience, while self-efficacy also contributed positively to resilience. In contrast, an external locus of control was negatively associated with career resilience, suggesting that individuals who perceive greater control over their

circumstances may cope more effectively with career challenges. Career resilience was also positively related to career satisfaction. The authors highlighted that resilient individuals are better able to adapt to changing circumstances, tolerate uncertainty, and develop coping strategies to overcome career obstacles. Overall, the study suggests that resilience and self-efficacy are important psychological resources for dealing with career setbacks and maintaining positive career outcomes.

Shin and Kelly (2015) examined resilience and career decision-making strategies as predictors of career decision difficulties among 364 college students. The findings showed that resilience was negatively associated with overall career decision difficulties, including lack of readiness, lack of information, and inconsistent information. Resilience and decision-making strategies together explained 46% of the variance in career decision difficulties. Procrastination emerged as the strongest predictor of difficulties, whereas internal locus of control, information gathering, and faster decision-making were associated with fewer difficulties. The study highlights the importance of developing resilience and reducing maladaptive decision-making strategies to facilitate effective career decision-making among students.

Timur and Balci (2023) examined the relationship between psychological resilience and career barriers among 461 university students (288 women & 173 men) studying online during the COVID-19 pandemic. Career Barriers Scale and Adult Psychological Resilience Scale were used. The study found a significant positive relationship between career barriers and overall psychological resilience. Career barriers were also positively associated with self-perception, future perception, structural style, and social resources, while family harmony showed a negative relationship. However, no significant differences were found in career barriers or resilience based on gender or grade level. The findings highlight the importance of resilience and social support in managing career-related challenges among university students.

Yang et al. (2025) examined the relationship between academic stress and college students' employment anxiety, focusing on psychological resilience as a mediating factor. A cross-sectional survey was conducted among 1124 students from three universities in China. The findings showed that academic stress was positively associated with employment anxiety and negatively associated with psychological resilience. In contrast, resilience was negatively related to employment anxiety and partially mediated the relationship between academic stress and employment anxiety, accounting for 19.50% of the total effect. The study, based on Conservation of Resources theory, highlights resilience as a protective psychological resource.

1.3 Career Anxiety

According to Hackett & Byars (1996), career anxiety is “a negative emotional state that is associated with concerns about one's abilities, the expectations of others, and the consequences of falling short of those expectations.” “Career anxiety is also defined as students’ views and concerns about their future employability” (Unguyren & Huseyinli, 2020). “A bad emotional condition brought on by an unknowable threat is known as anxiety. Career anxiety is a negative worry that is characterised by emotions of fear and anxiety about the future and what may go wrong for the individual” (Priastanti & Pratitis, 2021).

Atikah et al. (2023) systematically reviewed 780 articles on students’ Career Anxiety. The review identified career anxiety as encompassing negative feelings, physiological reactions, and maladaptive cognitive states related to career situations like decision-making and future employability. Their findings reveal that career anxiety is associated with a range of factors, including personality, family environment, psychological resources, and contextual influences like the COVID-19 pandemic. The review highlights the critical role of schools and environmental support in mitigating this anxiety.

Muceldili et al. (2023) conducted a study on how career anxiety affects undergraduate students’ meaning in life and life satisfaction, and whether career decision self-efficacy buffers these effects. Data were collected from 312 Turkish university students via online surveys measuring career anxiety, meaning in life, life satisfaction, and self-efficacy. Structural equation modeling and statistical analyses were used. Career anxiety reduces meaning in life, while meaning in life increases life satisfaction. Career decision self-efficacy acts as a buffer; students with higher confidence cope better with anxiety and maintain a sense of purpose. Gender differences were observed, with self-efficacy more protective for female students.

Hayat et al. (2024) conducted a study on how academic stress and career choice affect career anxiety in university students. A sample of 427 students from regular and self-support programmes of the University of Sargodha. Quantitative data were collected physically. Career Anxiety Scale and Student Stress Inventory were used. The findings concluded a significant effect of academic stress and Career choice on career anxiety. Previous research has found significant relationships between these variables, suggesting that universities should provide counselling and career guidance to help students manage stress and reduce career-related anxiety.

Ciminli and Addin (2026) conducted a study exploring different types of Career anxiety among young Adults. This study aimed to identify distinct latent profiles of career anxiety among young adults and examine predictors of profile membership, including academic unit

and year of study. A cross-sectional design was employed with 509 university students in Türkiye (80.4% female, 19.6% male) who completed measures of the Career Anxiety Scale, Hope Scale, Perceived Social Support Scale, Perfectionism Scale, and Coping Self-efficacy Scale. Latent profile analysis (LPA) was utilized to identify profiles, while multinomial logistic regression (R3STEP) examined relationships between profile membership and sociodemographic variables. Results revealed three distinct latent profiles: high anxiety and vulnerable (21.6%), characterized by elevated career anxiety with low hope, self-efficacy, and emotional support; low anxiety and high psychosocial strength (12.5%), demonstrating protective resource patterns; and moderate group (65.8%), representing normative developmental anxiety. Perfectionism did not differentiate profiles. Vocational school students and fourth-year students showed significantly lower likelihood of moderate profile membership when compared to high-anxiety and high-resource groups, respectively. The findings indicate career anxiety manifests through distinct psychosocial configurations rather than as a uniform experience, highlighting the importance of person-centred approaches in career counselling. These profiles provide a framework for developing targeted, group-specific interventions addressing varying combinations of hope, self-efficacy, and social support resources among young adults navigating career transitions.

1.4 Purpose

The purpose of the present study is to examine the relationships among hope, resilience, and career uncertainty and anxiety, assess their predictive role, and examine gender differences among students experiencing uncertainty related to competitive examinations.

1.5 Hypothesis

H₁: There will be a significant relationship between Hope and Career Anxiety.

H₂: There will be a significant relationship between Resilience and Career Anxiety.

H₃: There will be significant gender differences in Hope, Resilience, and Career Anxiety.

H₄: Hope and Resilience will significantly predict lower levels of career anxiety among students.

2. Methodology

2.1 Sample

The study used a sample of individuals from the Indian population, more specifically from Chandigarh, between the ages of 18 and 30, encompassing both males and females. The study has a sample size of 76 participants.

2.2 Measures

Adult Hope Scale (AHS): The Adult Hope Scale was used to measure Hope among students in this study. The scale was developed by Snyder et al. (1991). This scale consists of 12 items; 4 make up the Agency subscale, and 4 make up the Pathway subscale. The remaining 4 items are fillers. Each item is answered using an 8-point Likert scale ranging from definitely false to definitely true.

Brief Resilience Scale (BRS): The Brief Resilience Scale was used to measure Resilience among students in this study. The scale was developed by Smith et al. (2008). This scale consists of 6 items and a rating scale included: Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), and Strongly Agree (5).

Career Uncertainty and Anxiety Questionnaire: The Career Uncertainty and Anxiety Questionnaire was used to measure the career-related anxiety among students in this study. This scale was developed by Gleeson et al. (2023). This scale consists of 13 items and a rating scale included: Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), and Strongly Agree (5).

2.3 Procedure

The data were collected through a Google Form. The questionnaire link was created and shared with participants through an online platform. Before data collection, participants' voluntary participation was ensured. The data were analysed using correlation analysis to understand the relationships among hope, resilience, and career anxiety among students experiencing uncertainty related to competitive examinations.

3. Analysis of Data

3.1 Results

Table 1: *N, Mean and Standard Deviation*

	Gender	Pathway Subscale	Agency Subscale	Career Uncertainty & Anxiety Questionnaire	Brief Resilience Scale
N	Female	38	38	38	38
	Male	38	38	38	38
Mean	Female	24.6	24.3	31.6	18.9
	Male	24.1	23.7	36.2	19.1
Standard deviation	Female	4.57	3.99	11.3	3.83
	Male	3.16	4.44	9.65	3.08

Table 2: *Correlation between Hope, Resilience, and Career Anxiety*

	Pathway Subscale	Agency Subscale	Career Uncertainty & Anxiety Questionnaire	Brief Resilience Scale
Pathway Subscale	—			
Agency Subscale	0.591***	—		
Career Uncertainty & Anxiety Questionnaire	-0.174	-0.401***	—	
Brief Resilience Scale	0.326**	0.252*	-0.307**	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 3: *Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables by Gender*

	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Pathway Subscale	Female	38	24.6	26.0	4.57	0.741
	Male	38	24.1	24.0	3.16	0.512
Agency Subscale	Female	38	24.3	25.0	3.99	0.647
	Male	38	23.7	24.0	4.44	0.721
Career Uncertainty & Anxiety Questionnaire	Female	38	31.6	31.0	11.28	1.830
	Male	38	36.2	36.0	9.65	1.565
Brief Resilience Scale	Female	38	18.9	20.0	3.83	0.621
	Male	38	19.1	19.0	3.08	0.499

Table 4: *Independent Sample t-Test (Welch's t-Test) for gender Difference*

		Statistic	df	p
Pathway Subscale	Welch's t	0.526	65.8	.601
Agency Subscale	Welch's t	0.679	73.2	.499
Career Uncertainty & Career Anxiety	Welch's t	-1.912	72.3	.060
Brief Resilience Scale	Welch's t	-0.165	70.7	.869

Note. $H_a: \mu_{\text{Female}} \neq \mu_{\text{Male}}$

Table 5: *Model Fit Measures*

				Overall Model Test			
Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	df1	df2	p
1	0.472	0.223	0.190	6.87	3	72	<.001

Note. Models estimated using a sample size of N=76

Table 6: *Model Coefficients- Career Uncertainty & Anxiety Questionnaire*

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p
Intercept	64.212	8.478	7.57	<.001
Pathway Subscale	0.450	0.362	1.24	.217
Agency Subscale	-1.103	0.328	-3.36	.001
Brief Resilience Scale	-0.778	0.341	-2.28	.026

4. Discussion

The present study aimed to understand the relationships among hope, resilience, and career uncertainty and career anxiety among students. The findings indicate meaningful associations between these psychological variables. Overall, the results suggest that hope and resilience may play an important role in how students experience uncertainty and anxiety related to their careers.

The results showed a significant positive correlation between the Pathway and Agency subscales of hope ($r = .591$, $p < .001$). This indicates that students who reported a greater ability to identify pathways toward their goals also tended to report greater confidence in initiating and sustaining actions toward those goals. This finding is theoretically consistent with Snyder's Hope Theory, in which pathways thinking and agency thinking are considered complementary components of hope.

A significant negative correlation was observed between Agency and Career Uncertainty and Career Anxiety ($r = -.401$, $p < .001$). This suggests that students with greater confidence in their ability to achieve goals tended to experience lower levels of career uncertainty and anxiety. In the context of competitive examinations and uncertain career outcomes, a stronger sense of agency may help students feel more capable of dealing with setbacks and maintaining goal-directed behaviour.

In contrast, the relationship between Pathway thinking and Career Uncertainty and Career Anxiety was negative but not statistically significant ($r = -.174$). This indicates that simply perceiving multiple routes toward one's goals may not be sufficient to reduce career-related anxiety. Career anxiety may be more strongly related to the student's perceived ability and confidence to act on those pathways, which may explain the stronger association observed for agency.

The Brief Resilience Scale was positively correlated with Pathway thinking ($r = .326$, $p < .01$) and Agency thinking ($r = .252$, $p < .05$). These findings suggest that students with

greater resilience also tended to demonstrate stronger hope-related thinking. Resilient students may be better able to recover from difficulties, maintain their goals, and continue searching for alternative ways to achieve them. Resilience may therefore support both the identification of possible pathways and the motivation to pursue those pathways.

Furthermore, resilience was significantly negatively correlated with Career Uncertainty and Career Anxiety ($r = -.307, p < .01$). This indicates that students with higher resilience tended to report lower career-related uncertainty and anxiety. In situations involving examination uncertainty, cancellations, or unpredictable career outcomes, resilience may help students adapt to stressful circumstances and maintain psychological stability.

The *first hypothesis* stated that there would be a significant relationship between Hope & Career Anxiety. The results partially supported this hypothesis. Agency was significantly negatively related to career uncertainty and career anxiety, whereas Pathway was not significant.

The *Second hypothesis* stated that there would be a significant relationship between Resilience and Career Anxiety. The results supported this hypothesis. Resilience was significantly negatively related to career uncertainty and career anxiety.

An independent-samples t-test using Welch's correction was conducted to examine the *fourth hypothesis*, gender differences in pathway thinking, agency thinking, career uncertainty and career anxiety, and resilience. The results showed no statistically significant gender differences in any of the variables.

For pathway thinking, females had a slightly higher mean score ($M = 24.6, SD = 4.57$) than males ($M = 24.1, SD = 3.16$). However, this difference was not statistically significant, Welch's $t(65.8) = 0.526, p = .601$. Similarly, females scored slightly higher on agency thinking ($M = 24.3, SD = 3.99$) than males ($M = 23.7, SD = 4.44$), but the difference was not significant (Welch's $t(73.2) = 0.679, p = .499$). These findings suggest that male and female participants showed comparable levels of hope-related thinking.

For the Career Uncertainty and Anxiety Questionnaire, males obtained a higher mean score ($M = 36.2, SD = 9.65$) than females ($M = 31.6, SD = 11.28$). However, this difference did not reach statistical significance, Welch's $t(72.3) = -1.912, p = .060$. Although the result is close to the conventional .05 significance level and may indicate a possible tendency for males to report greater career uncertainty and anxiety, it should not be interpreted as a significant gender difference. Regarding resilience, males ($M = 19.1, SD = 3.08$) and females ($M = 18.9, SD = 3.83$) had very similar mean scores. The difference was not statistically significant, Welch's $t(70.7) = -0.165, p = .869$.

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine whether pathway thinking, agency thinking, and resilience predicted the Career Uncertainty and Anxiety Questionnaire. The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(3, 72) = 6.87, p < .001$, indicating that the set of predictors significantly predicted career uncertainty and anxiety. The model produced an R of .472 and an R^2 of .223, indicating that pathway thinking, agency thinking, and resilience together explained approximately 22.3% of the variance in career uncertainty and career anxiety. The adjusted R^2 was .190, suggesting that approximately 19.0% of the variance was explained after adjustment for the number of predictors and sample size.

At the individual predictor level, agency thinking was a significant negative predictor of career uncertainty and career anxiety ($B = -1.103, p = .001$). This indicates that higher agency was associated with lower career uncertainty and anxiety, when pathway thinking and resilience were statistically controlled. This finding suggests that students' confidence in their ability to initiate and sustain goal-directed actions may be particularly important in managing career-related uncertainty.

Resilience was also a significant negative predictor of career uncertainty and career anxiety ($B = -0.778, p = .026$). Thus, students with higher resilience tended to report lower career uncertainty and anxiety, even after accounting for pathway and agency thinking. This finding supports the view that resilience may help students adapt to uncertain and stressful career situations.

In contrast, pathway thinking was not a significant predictor of career uncertainty and career anxiety ($B = 0.450, p = .217$). Although pathway thinking was positively associated with agency and negatively correlated with career uncertainty and anxiety in the correlation analysis, it did not make a significant unique contribution when agency and resilience were entered simultaneously into the regression model. This may indicate that the students' perceived ability and motivation to act on their goals (agency) are more strongly related to career anxiety than simply identifying possible routes toward those goals.

The *third hypothesis* stated that Hope and Resilience would significantly predict lower levels of career anxiety. The results partially supported this hypothesis. Overall, the findings indicate that the regression model was significant, with agency and resilience emerging as significant negative predictors, whereas pathway thinking was not a significant unique predictor.

The present findings align with those of Smith et al. (2008), who demonstrated that the Brief Resilience Scale reliably assesses the ability to bounce back from stress as a construct distinct from resilience resources. In their validation study, the BRS showed strong internal

consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80-.91$) and a unidimensional factor structure across student, cardiac, and chronic pain samples, which is consistent with the factor structure observed in our sample. Similarly, we found that BRS scores were negatively correlated with anxiety, depression, and physical symptoms, corroborating Smith et al.'s observation that the BRS uniquely predicts negative health outcomes even when controlling for optimism, social support, and other resilience measures. Collectively, our results support the BRS as a valuable tool for assessing resilience as recovery from stress, particularly in health-related contexts where the ability to rebound from adversity may be more directly relevant than the presence of protective resources alone.

5. Conclusion

The present study examined the relationships among hope, resilience, and career uncertainty and career anxiety among students experiencing uncertainty related to competitive examinations. The findings highlight the importance of psychological resources, particularly agency and resilience, in understanding students' experiences of career-related uncertainty and anxiety. Overall, the results indicate that students who possess greater confidence in their ability to initiate and sustain goal-directed actions and those who demonstrate greater resilience tend to experience lower levels of career uncertainty and anxiety.

The findings showed that the two components of hope were not equally related to career uncertainty and anxiety. Agency was significantly and negatively associated with career uncertainty and anxiety, indicating that students who felt more capable of taking action toward their goals tended to report lower levels of career-related anxiety. In contrast, pathway thinking showed a negative but non-significant association with career uncertainty and anxiety. This suggests that simply identifying alternative routes toward one's goals may not be sufficient to reduce career anxiety. The confidence and motivation to act on those pathways may be more important in situations characterised by uncertainty.

Resilience was also significantly and negatively associated with career uncertainty and anxiety. This finding suggests that resilient students may be better able to adapt to stressful and unpredictable circumstances associated with competitive examinations and career decisions. Resilience may enable students to recover from setbacks, maintain psychological stability, and continue working toward their goals despite uncertainty.

The regression findings further strengthened these observations. The overall regression model was statistically significant and explained 22.3% of the variance in career uncertainty and career anxiety. Agency and resilience emerged as significant negative predictors, whereas

pathway thinking did not make a significant unique contribution. These findings indicate that agency and resilience may have particular relevance in understanding students' career-related anxiety when the effects of the other variables are considered simultaneously.

The study also found no statistically significant gender differences in pathway thinking, agency thinking, career uncertainty and anxiety, or resilience. Although males reported somewhat higher career uncertainty and anxiety than females, the difference did not reach statistical significance. Therefore, the findings suggest that gender alone may not adequately explain differences in students' career-related psychological experiences.

The findings have important implications for educational institutions, career counsellors, and student-support services. Career counselling programmes should not focus solely on academic preparation or career information but should also strengthen students' psychological resources, particularly agency and resilience.

Students can be encouraged to set realistic goals, develop alternative pathways, maintain motivation, and learn effective ways of responding to examination setbacks and uncertain career outcomes. Workshops on stress management, adaptive coping, problem-solving, and emotional regulation may further help students manage career-related anxiety.

Institutions can also provide accessible counselling and early psychological support during periods of examination cancellations, delays, or uncertainty. Since gender did not significantly influence the study variables, interventions should be individualised according to students' psychological needs rather than based on gender. Overall, developing students' confidence to take purposeful action and their ability to recover from setbacks may help them navigate uncertain academic and career environments more effectively.

6. Societal Impact

The present study examining the relationship among hope, resilience, career anxiety, and examination uncertainty among students preparing for competitive examinations has important social implications. Competitive examinations are highly significant for students because success or failure may influence their educational opportunities, career choices, financial stability, and future aspirations. When examinations are cancelled, postponed, affected by paper-leak incidents, or surrounded by uncertainty, students may experience increased stress and anxiety about their careers. Therefore, understanding the psychological factors that help students cope with such uncertainty is important not only for individual well-being but also for educational institutions and society.

One of the major social implications of this study is the need to recognise career anxiety as an important concern among students preparing for competitive examinations. Students may spend several years preparing for examinations, often investing considerable time, money, and emotional energy. Unexpected changes in examination schedules or uncertainty regarding examination processes can make students feel that their efforts and plans are beyond their control. Such experiences can affect motivation, academic functioning, interpersonal relationships, and overall psychological well-being. The findings of the present study can increase awareness among parents, teachers, counsellors, and educational authorities about these challenges.

The study also highlights the potential importance of hope as a psychological resource. Hope involves the ability to identify meaningful goals and develop pathways and motivation to achieve them. During uncertain examination situations, students with greater hope may be better able to maintain their goals and consider alternative ways of achieving them when their original plans are disrupted. From a social perspective, promoting hope may therefore help students maintain motivation and develop a more flexible approach toward career planning. Educational institutions can incorporate goal-setting activities, career guidance, and positive future-oriented interventions into student-support programmes.

Similarly, resilience may have an important role in helping students cope with academic and career-related difficulties. Competitive examination preparation often involves repeated failures, long preparation periods, uncertainty, and intense competition. Developing resilience can help students recover from setbacks and continue working toward meaningful goals. Resilience-building programmes could include stress-management techniques, problem-solving skills, adaptive coping strategies, emotional regulation, and strategies for dealing with academic failure. Such programmes may be particularly useful during periods of examination disruption.

Another important social implication concerns the role of educational institutions and coaching centres. Psychological support should not be limited to academic preparation. Institutions can establish accessible counselling services for students experiencing examination-related anxiety and uncertainty. Regular mental-health awareness sessions, individual counselling, peer-support programmes, and workshops on coping with uncertainty can provide students with practical support. Counsellors can also help students develop alternative career plans so that their sense of identity and future does not depend entirely on the outcome of a single competitive examination.

The findings may also have implications for parents and families. Excessive academic expectations and pressure can increase students' anxiety, particularly when examination outcomes are uncertain. Parents can be encouraged to provide emotional support rather than focusing exclusively on examination performance. Creating an environment in which students can discuss their fears, failures, and career concerns without judgment may promote psychological well-being. Families can also encourage students to consider multiple career pathways instead of viewing one examination as the only route to success.

At the policy level, the study emphasises the importance of considering students' psychological well-being when making decisions related to competitive examinations. Examination authorities should provide clear, timely, and transparent communication when examinations are postponed, cancelled, or affected by irregularities. Uncertainty can become particularly stressful when students do not receive reliable information about future examination schedules or procedures. Policies that ensure timely communication, fair examination practices, grievance mechanisms, and appropriate support systems may reduce unnecessary psychological distress among students.

The study may also contribute to reducing the stigma associated with seeking psychological help. Students preparing for competitive examinations may hesitate to seek counselling because they believe anxiety is a normal part of competition or fear being perceived as weak. By highlighting psychological well-being as an important component of academic and career development, the study can encourage a more supportive attitude toward mental-health services. Normalising counselling and psychological support can help students seek assistance before their anxiety becomes severe.

At a broader societal level, the study emphasises that career development is not only an academic or economic issue but also a psychological and social issue. Young people preparing for competitive examinations represent an important part of the future workforce. Supporting their psychological well-being can contribute to healthier educational environments, better career adjustment, and more productive participation in society. Helping students cope effectively with uncertainty may also reduce the negative consequences associated with prolonged examination-related stress.

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