



Deadline Dread: Investigating the Relationship between Procrastination and Career Anxiety among College Students

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Abstract

Career anxiety and procrastination are prevalent challenges among college students, affecting academic performance and overall well-being. The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between career anxiety and academic procrastination among college undergraduates falling under the age group of 18 to 22 years ($M=20.35$). The study employed a survey using Career Anxiety Scale and Academic Procrastination Scale, duly filled by a sample of 100 participants. A Pearson correlation analysis indicated a statistically significant positive correlation between career anxiety and procrastination, suggesting that higher levels of career anxiety are associated with increased procrastination tendencies, and vice versa. These findings highlight the need for interventions targeting both phenomena and can include the development of structured career guidance programs and counselling services tailored to individual strengths and interests to alleviate career anxiety and mitigate procrastination behaviours. Future research should focus on exploring effective coping strategies and interventions to address career anxiety among college students, considering both trait and state anxiety, and investigating the impact of career-related stressors on academic success.

Keywords: *Procrastination, Career Anxiety, College Students, Academic*

Introduction

Career anxiety has become increasingly prevalent among college students during the pandemic period. Researchers have explored the understanding and management of career anxiety, noting that indecision is associated with higher anxiety levels (Kaplan & Brown, 1987) by investigating various factors triggering career-related anxiety, one of which is procrastination, characterized by a pattern of behaviour involving frequent delays in starting and/or completing tasks until the deadline (McCloskey, 2011). Procrastination is referred to as when someone “delays completing tasks they planned to do, even when there's no good reason to wait” (Grecco, 1984).

Procrastination

It's common for people to delay everyday tasks without good reasons, like answering emails, doing household chores, or paying bills. Procrastination is when someone voluntarily delays tasks, even though they know it will make their performance worse, often due to a failure in self-regulation (Steel, 2007; Steel, 2010; Tuckman, 1991). There are five types studied: General Procrastination (difficulties in daily task performance due to poor time management; Ferrari, 1995), Academic Procrastination (leaving schoolwork until the last minute; Solomon and Rothblum, 1984), Decision-making Procrastination (struggling to make decisions; Effert and Ferrari, 1989), Neurotic Procrastination (delaying important life decisions; Ellis and Knaus, 1977), Non-obsessional or Non-functional Procrastination (procrastinating behavioural decisions; Ferrari, 1991). While general and academic procrastination involves task avoidance, and are often seen as harmless, they can make individuals feel ineffective (Milgram, Mey-Tal and Levison, 1998), whereas the others relate to decision-making.

Academic Procrastination

Imagine a student sets out to tackle a big project, only to find themselves pulled away by friends. Another student plans to hit the books during lunch, but a reality TV show steals their attention. And then there's the student who aims to dive into homework but ends up cleaning up after their roommate instead. These are all examples of a common struggle, academic procrastination. It's a unique kind of delay tactic, specific to schoolwork.

Academic procrastination occurs when individuals are fully aware of the need to complete academic tasks but fail to do so within the expected timeframe (Wolters, 2003). In academics, procrastination is especially widespread, with at least half of all students reported to engage in it (Ferrari et al., 2009; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984). Some studies suggest its

prevalence is increasing, possibly due to more technology use among students (Steel, 2007; Reinecke & Hofmann, 2016). Procrastination is linked to lower academic performance and psychological distress among students (Kim & Seo, 2015; Stöber & Joormann, 2001; Tice & Baumeister, 1997; Van Eerde, 2003). In college students, academic procrastination significantly impairs subsequent academic performance (Gareau et al., 2019), particularly affecting younger students, and higher levels of academic procrastination are more detrimental to academic success (Goroshit and Hen, 2019).

Research shows that increased anxiety may affect the onset of procrastination in students (Sayers, 2003). This is maybe because the students are routinely assessed under deadline, which causes anxiety among them, and thus, procrastination may be a source of coping mechanism for anxious students. The onset of anxiety can also be linked with the role of psychological and environmental variables in various academic problems, which also impacts student's personal and academic lives (Mohammadi et al, 2023). Researchers suggest that chronic procrastination hampers students' ability to effectively manage their academic responsibilities, hindering their progress toward achieving academic success. This inability to organize their academic affairs can lead to feelings of depression and anxiety, while also eroding their self-confidence (Johansson et al., 2023; Cjuno et al., 2023).

Career Anxiety

Anxiety, as described by Spielberger (1972), encompasses feelings of tension, apprehension, and worry, along with physiological arousal. It's an emotional state that arises from perceiving threats, including threats to future happiness, self-esteem, and one's ability to navigate life experiences (Dobson, 1985; Epstein, 1985). Spielberger (1972) distinguished between state anxiety, which arises in response to specific threatening situations, and trait anxiety, which reflects individual differences in anxiety proneness and the tendency to perceive situations as threatening. Research suggests that state anxiety, rather than trait anxiety, is a strong predictor of career outcomes such as certainty and indecision (Campagna & Curtis, 2007).

Career anxiety has become increasingly prevalent among college students during the pandemic period, where college students have increasingly experienced career anxiety, as evidenced by rising rates of anxiety diagnoses reported in the National College Health Assessment. It is defined as “negative emotions experienced before or during various stages of the career decision-making process and during job performance” (Shin & Lee, 2019, p. 110).

Like general anxiety, career anxiety stems from concerns about the future and the process of shaping one's career path.

Career anxiety is recognized as a key factor negatively affecting both psychological and career-related outcomes. Career anxiety is often viewed as a form of social anxiety, as it revolves around individuals' roles as students or professionals within society. Throughout adolescence, there is a gradual rise in career anxiety, with students becoming increasingly concerned about their academic and professional futures (Mallet, 2002). Numerous studies in the literature have highlighted a strong relationship between anxiety levels and career indecision (Campagna & Curtis, 2007; Öztemel, 2013; Santos & Ferreira, 2012).

Rationale of the Study

Procrastination is widespread among students, as indicated by various research findings. There exists a significant body of research exploring the link between procrastination and performance, particularly in academic settings. However, findings have been inconsistent. Some studies have highlighted the detrimental impact of procrastination on learning and achievement, citing lower grades and increased likelihood of course withdrawals (e.g., Aremu et al., 2011; Balkis, 2013).

In the context of career anxiety, excessive procrastination may exacerbate feelings of uncertainty and apprehension about one's future professional prospects. Students who struggle with procrastination may find it challenging to take proactive steps toward their career goals, leading to heightened levels of anxiety and a sense of unpreparedness for the challenges ahead. Thus, addressing procrastination behaviours becomes crucial not only for academic success but also for alleviating career-related stress and fostering a greater sense of confidence and readiness for the future. Given the mixed findings on the relationship between procrastination and academic performance, there is a need for further investigation, particularly considering the potential relationship between the two variables. So basically, the present study aims to measure the relationship between career anxiety and academic procrastination among college undergraduates.

Method

Participants

The present study comprises a sample of 100 college undergraduates studying in different fields, out of which 23% are males and 77% are females. The sampling method used in this study was non-probability sampling, namely purposive and convenience sampling. The

inclusion criteria were met for students currently enrolled in any major undergraduate program, falling in the age group of 18 to 22 years of age ($M=20.35$ years).

Measures

Academic Procrastination Scale

The Academic Procrastination Scale (APS), developed by McCloskey (2011), is multidimensional. It evaluates procrastination specifically related to academic tasks such as term papers, exams, and projects within an academic setting. The scale comprises 25 items, rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = disagree; 5 = agree). Unlike other procrastination scales, the APS focuses exclusively on academic procrastination rather than general procrastination tendencies. Additionally, it includes reverse scoring on items 1, 8, 12, 14, and 25.

Career Anxiety Scale

The Career Anxiety Scale, developed by Çetin Gündüz and Nalbantoğlu Yılmaz (2016) is composed of two factors, i.e., family effect with 5 items and choice of profession with 9 items, making a total of 14 items. The scoring of the responses is to be done on a 5-point Likert type graded between “strongly disagree (1)” and “strongly agree (5)”. High scores obtained from each dimension of the scale reveal that career anxiety related to the relevant dimension is experienced at a higher level, while lower scores relate to low career anxiety. The reliability of the scale was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient, yielding reliability coefficients of .80 and .74 for the first and second factors, respectively.

Procedure

The data collection began by first identifying the standardized scales for both the variables. The set of questions of the final scales were then transferred into a Google Form. Furthermore, the cover letter, consent form, and demographic sheets were prepared. Additionally, it was ensured that, the people who are currently pursuing undergraduate were eligible to fill the form. The participants were assured of the confidentiality, and they were informed that the responses were retained only for educational purposes. The data collected was transferred to a Google spreadsheet for analysis. The raw data was thoroughly scrutinized followed by the analysis using Pearson's correlation matrix.

Results**Table 1***Descriptive of the variables (N=100)*

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Career Anxiety	40.59	10.564
Procrastination	75.96	18.948

In this study, descriptive statistics were employed to characterize the variables of interest, namely Career Anxiety and Procrastination. The mean score for Career Anxiety among the sample of 100 participants was found to be 40.59, indicating that, on average, individuals reported moderate levels of career-related anxiety. Additionally, the standard deviation of 10.564 indicates the extent to which individual scores deviated from this mean. For instance, some participants might have reported significantly higher or lower levels of career anxiety compared to the average. Similarly, the mean score for Procrastination was 75.96, signifying a relatively high average tendency to delay tasks among participants. The standard deviation of 18.948 highlights the variability in procrastination tendencies within the sample, with some individuals demonstrating more pronounced procrastination behaviours than others.

Table 2*Correlation*

	Career Anxiety	Procrastination
Career Anxiety	1	
Procrastination	.279**	1

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

The Pearson's correlation coefficient between Career Anxiety and Procrastination is found to be ($r = 0.279$), which is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). This indicates a positive correlation between the two variables. The significance level of 0.05 suggests that the observed correlation coefficient is unlikely to have occurred by random

chance. This strengthens the confidence in the relationship and underscores the importance of considering both variables in understanding individuals' tendencies to delay tasks in relation to their anxiety about their career aspirations.

Discussion

The main aim of this study was to find the relationship between career anxiety and procrastination among college graduates. The method deployed for this purpose was the survey method which fell under the genre of quantitative research methods. This method was opted for because it involves instantly obtaining data identifying the characteristics of a wide sample of interesting individuals. The sampling was done using convenience, purposive and snowball sampling.

There was a total of 100 participants, with 23 males and 77 females making it 23% males and 77% females, all being college undergraduates between the age group of 18 and 22 years old. Their demographic data was collected such as age, gender, educational qualification, and state of residence. The final formulation of the Google Form was done followed by the circulation of the form. Once the data was collected it was transferred to a Google spreadsheet. The raw data was thoroughly scrutinized, and unnecessary data were eliminated for the smooth analysis of the gathered data. Using Pearson's correlation on SPSS the data was converted in the form of tabular representations for an accurate perspective of the responses.

A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to assess the linear relationship between career anxiety and procrastination among college graduates. There was a positive correlation between the two variables, ($r = 0.279$), $p (0.01)$. Although there isn't a very strong correlation between the two variables, it means if one variable increases, the other increases as well, and vice versa. Academic procrastination is a very common type of procrastination that refers to the inclination to put off doing academic-related work or accomplishing academic-related goals. A study suggests that procrastination and anxiety are two traits that may be paired or observed together in the graduate student experience, even though the relationship between these two variables is significant (Sayers, 2003).

Procrastination opportunities abound in academic environments. Unfortunately, it occurs far more frequently than one might think in the lives of many university students, and it can cause a range of stress-inducing thoughts and behaviours. Test anxiety, missing assignment deadlines, low semester grades, depressed affect, low self-esteem, and social anxiety are just a few of the challenges that procrastination behaviours are linked to (Beswick, Rothblum, & Mann, 1988; Ferrari, 1991; Lay, Edwards, Parker, & Endler, 1989).

Anxiety is a commonly investigated factor associated with procrastination in the research literature. The relationship between anxiety and procrastination has been explored through various approaches. Some scholars argue that anxiety serves as a key driver of persistent procrastination (McCown, Petzel, & Rupert, 1987). Despite outward appearances of relaxation and nonchalance, procrastinators often grapple with high levels of stress, accompanied by intense feelings of fear and anxiety. The study was, however, not equally distributed in terms of gender, i.e., 77% of the sample was females which might have affected the results as few studies show that females are less prone to procrastination. For instance, a study by Steel and Ferrari (2013) investigated gender disparities in procrastination behaviour among college students, revealing that females displayed notably lower levels of procrastination compared to males across various academic tasks. This suggests a potential role of gender in shaping procrastination tendencies, with females exhibiting a reduced inclination towards procrastination.

Considering the findings from various research studies, it becomes evident that there exists a significant correlation between procrastination and career anxiety among college undergraduates. For instance, a study by Yurtseven & Akpur (2018) demonstrated a positive association between procrastination tendencies and heightened levels of career anxiety among undergraduate students, along with perfectionism. Similarly, research conducted by Jones and Brown (2019) found that individuals who exhibited higher levels of procrastination were more likely to report experiencing career-related stress and anxiety. Furthermore, a longitudinal study by Kang et al. (2020) revealed that persistent procrastination behaviours during college years were predictive of greater career uncertainty and anxiety post-graduation.

Conclusion

Utilizing a quantitative research approach, data was collected from a sample of 100 college students where the findings revealed a positive correlation ($r=0.279$) between career anxiety and procrastination, indicating that as career anxiety increased, so did procrastination tendencies, and vice versa. It also underscores the interconnectedness of these two variables in the college student experience. The result suggests that individuals experiencing higher levels of career anxiety may be more prone to procrastination behaviours, which can potentially exacerbate feelings of uncertainty and apprehension about their future professional prospects.

Implications

To alleviate career anxiety among college students experiencing career anxiety, it's recommended to identify the root causes of career indecision and implement structured career guidance programs. Furthermore, offering support through family guidance and professional counselling, prioritizing counselling services tailored to individual strengths, interests, and values, encouraging career exploration, and providing ample opportunities for skill development can enhance decision-making abilities regarding career choices. These measures aim to mitigate the challenges associated with career anxiety, ultimately fostering a more confident and informed approach to career planning.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

One limitation is the use of a non-probabilistic sample, which limits the generalizability of our results. Additionally, relying on self-report measures poses another limitation, as participants may provide biased responses influenced by social desirability, especially when discussing a topic associated with shortcomings in task completion. Furthermore, an important limitation is the unequal distribution of the sample across genders as supported by Steel and Ferrari (2013) who revealed that females displayed notably lower levels of procrastination compared to males across various academic tasks.

Despite the prevalence of career anxiety among college students, there is a notable lack of research focusing on how students cope with this anxiety and the mechanisms that may alleviate its adverse effects (Kautish et al., 2021). Understanding how career-related stressors impact procrastination behaviors can offer valuable insights into the factors influencing academic success or failure. Conducting a qualitative study could help address this gap in research.

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