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## Career Anxiety as a Predictor of Career Adaptability and Optimism of High School Seniors Who Want to Make a Career Transition to University

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### ABSTRACT

Numerous factors interact throughout the transition process of senior high school pupils to university. In this process, students' job adaptability, degrees of optimism, and career anxiety emerge as significant determinants. The anxiety students encounter throughout the transition to university can influence their career planning and inform their academic and professional choices. The impact of career anxiety on students' adaptability skills and its correlation with their degrees of optimism is a significant area of research. This study employed a predictive correlational model to assess the degree to which career anxiety forecasts career adjustment and optimism levels among final-year high school students intending to transition to university. The study's participants were 896 senior high school students, 462 females and 434 males. The data were gathered utilizing the personal information form developed by the researchers and the verified and trustworthy career adaptability and optimism scale and professional anxiety scale. The study employed an independent sample t-test to ascertain if there were significant differences in students' career flexibility, optimism levels, and career anxiety based on gender. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to assess significant differences based on school type. The investigation revealed a considerable gender difference in career anxiety throughout the transition to university. The origin of this disparity between male and female pupils was analyzed by existing literature. Furthermore, a negative and moderately significant correlation was identified between career adaptability and the optimism levels of senior high school students and their career anxiety. This study suggests that persons experiencing elevated career anxiety may possess diminished career adaptability and optimism. Furthermore, an analysis of the sub-dimensions of career anxiety revealed that familial influence and career selection significantly impacted students' career adaptability and levels of optimism. These findings were contextualized within the broader career development literature, and evidence-based strategies were suggested to support adolescents' psychological resilience and career readiness in educational settings.

**Keywords:** Career adaptability, optimism, career anxiety, career transition

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## **Introduction**

In the 21st century, the global economy is advancing swiftly. This circumstance necessitates people adjusting to an ever-evolving environment to succeed in business swiftly (Coutinho, Dam & Blustein, 2008). The dynamics of globalization, the process of internationalization, and rapid technological advancement deeply affect not only the job search processes of individuals but also the relationships they establish with the business world (Nota, Ginevra & Soresi, 2012). In this context, the need for high school graduates to shape their future careers through university education has become even more important due to the increasing competition in the business world (Savickas, 2013).

When considered in conjunction with the anxieties that emerge during this phase, the employment-related challenges high school seniors encounter during the transition to university can significantly impact young individuals' career adaptability and optimism (Hirschi, 2009). According to Savickas and Porfeli (2012), the capacity for career adaptation and optimism is of utmost importance in enabling individuals to effectively navigate the dynamic corporate environment and manage their inherent uncertainties. The primary objective of this study is to investigate the impact of career anxiety on career adaptability and optimism within the population of high school seniors. Scholarly literature has indicated that variations in job flexibility and optimism levels may exist based on gender (Hackett & Betz, 1981). Hence, the study additionally considered the impact of gender on professional anxiety, career adaptability, and optimism.

In addition, this study aims to identify the leading causes and predictors of career anxiety among adolescents. The reason for examining career adaptability and optimism is that these concepts play a critical role in helping young people cope with the challenges they may encounter in their career journey and prepare themselves for the future (Rottinghaus, Day & Borgen, 2005). The findings are expected to improve guidance services for high school seniors, assist them in career planning and decision-making, and also contribute to alleviating career-related anxiety.

## **Career Adaptability**

Savickas (1997) conceptualizes career adaptability as a comprehensive and developmental construct that emphasizes individuals' capacity to cope with career-related tasks, transitions, and traumas across the lifespan. Career adaptability refers to a person's capacity to cope with both anticipated and unanticipated challenges and obstacles that arise during the career transition phase, and adaptability roles effectively (Savickas, 1997; Savickas, 1999); ability encompasses several dimensions: the capacity to navigate occupations and working conditions (Super & Knasel, 1981); readiness to face future changes, readiness for new job roles and responsibilities, and ability to adjust career plans in response to unforeseen events (Ebenehi et al., 2016; Tladinyane & Van der Merwe, 2015); a psychosocial resource aiding individuals in effectively managing career transitions and challenges, thereby facilitating their adaptation to the work environment (Savickas, 2013; Zacher, Ambiel, & Noronha, 2015); ongoing exploration of both self environment to align one's identity with the occupational context (Bimrose et al., 2011); and a psychosocial skill enabling employees, and manage changes in situations (Savickas, 1997). Career adaptability helps the individual to self-regulate in developmental vocational tasks, vocational transitions, and trauma situations in working life and to successfully resolve the complex problems they experience (Barto, Lambert & Brott, 2015; Bimrose & Hearne, 2012; Klehe et al., 2011).

Savickas (2012) posited that professional adaptation has four dimensions: worry, control, curiosity, and confidence. Concern pertains to the individual's apprehension regarding their future profession, contemplating the positions they will assume, and formulating strategies accordingly. Control pertains to assuming responsibility for one's career choices and selecting from available options. Curiosity encompasses an individual's desire to examine their interests, abilities, values, personality traits, and occupational requirements. Confidence pertains to an individual's self-assurance and capacity to navigate challenges in job advancement. Optimism is essential in the career adaptation process and is closely associated with the qualities of concern, control, curiosity, and confidence defined by Savickas (2012). In this context, individuals' levels of optimism enhance their professional adaptability, hence increasing their effectiveness across these four dimensions, particularly during uncertain and challenging periods. Account. Optimism must also be considered when assessing individuals' job adaptability levels (Rottinghaus, Day, & Borgen, 2005; Siyez & Belkıs, 2016). Especially during the pandemic and the period of remote education, it is crucial to emphasize the necessity of bolstering students' resilience, cultivating optimistic perspectives in the face of challenges, and maintaining their self-confidence and belief in their future careers (Kartol & Söner, 2022). Santilli et al. (2017) and Cabras and Mondo (2018) highlighted the mediating function of future orientation in the correlation between job adaptability and life happiness in their research on adolescents from many cultures. Bölükbaşı and Kirdök (2019) established the mediating role of future orientation in their research involving Turkish teenagers; likewise, Hirschi (2012) identified that career adaptability correlates with elements such as career planning, self-esteem, and academic success. Optimism enhances individuals' capacity to influence their career trajectories and manage problems within professional flexibility. Optimism can enhance students' hope for the future and their career confidence by bolstering their resilience, particularly during challenging periods such as transitions.

## **Optimism**

Optimism, one of the important dimensions of positive psychology, reflects positive tendencies in achieving success and working life now and in the future (Ginevra & Nota, 2017). Optimism is linked to favorable results such as improved performance, goal attainment, and overall mental and physical well-being. It stems from an individual's anticipation of positive outcomes (Dedeoğlu et al., 2016; Eryılmaz, 2013; Rottinghaus, Day, & Borgen, 2005); it includes the process of adapting to the future, developing a positive perspective, supporting positive thinking, and maintaining healthy relationships (Gül et al., 2019); optimism is a predisposition or mindset characterized by the inclination to perceive work, events, and circumstances in a positive light (Sheldon & King, 2001). Optimism involves a general anticipation of favorable outcomes in the future (Bryant & Cvengros, 2004), a positive assessment of forthcoming situations (Karademas, 2005), and a propensity to perceive the world and events positively, alongside a pervasive expectation of favorable future outcomes across various life domains (Scheier & Carver, 1985). Optimistic individuals are inclined to contemplate their career trajectory, exhibit a keen interest in professional growth, and feel at ease with their chosen careers (McIlveen et al., 2013). Individuals with high career optimism generally expect the best outcome and feel comfortable making career plans (Rottinghaus et al., 2005). Adolescents' optimism may positively affect their career development. As individuals' life satisfaction, their career adaptability generally increases because those with a positive perspective on events and an optimistic tendency about the future can solve the problems they face in their career journey and career development processes more effectively (Eryılmaz & Mutlu, 2017).

Career optimism reflects the tendencies of individuals who evaluate events, life, and career positively, expect the best outcome from future events, and feel comfortable in their career development and planning (Garcia et al., 2015; Karadaş et al., 2017; Sökmen & Aydıntan, 2016). Therefore, career optimism increases individuals' motivation and encourages positive coping behaviors, contributing to the development and maintenance of general well-being. It is known that optimism positively affects individuals' physical and mental health and helps them find more permanent solutions to problems. Career optimism also refers to individuals' positive outlook towards their careers and the future (Scheier & Carver, 1985). This positive approach can be said to play an essential role in coping with career anxiety. Optimistic individuals can overcome the difficulties they face in their careers more effectively and develop a hopeful attitude towards the future.

### **Career Anxiety**

Stressful situations often lead to emotional reactions that cause anxiety in individuals (Atkinson et al., 2010). The anxiety, termed state anxiety, denotes a proclivity felt in response to a perceived threatening circumstance. Conversely, general trait anxiety is described as a personality attribute characterized by a propensity to experience anxiety across diverse situations (Spielberger, 1966). However, some theorists posit the significance of considering the individual's context (Endler et al., 1991; Savickas, 2000). Insufficient skills for making career decisions can trigger anxiety. Additionally, anxiety can hinder acquiring and utilizing knowledge and skills essential to career decision-making (Crites, 1974; Goodstein, 1965). Newman et al. (1989) found that these two factors may mutually influence each other. Career anxiety is generally divided into four categories: process-related anxiety, uncertainty-related anxiety, choice-related anxiety, and outcome-related anxiety (Betz & Serling, 1993; Saka & Gati, 2007; Xu & Tracey, 2015). In The literature, career anxiety is delineated as an outcome stemming from the challenges and uncertainties individuals encounter regarding their vocational and career choices (Fouad et al., 2010), individuals' concerns about their future occupations and careers (Super, 1957), and individuals' insecurities about their abilities and skills (Hackett & Betz, 1981). Career anxiety can also affect individuals' career choices and academic success (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). In other words, career anxiety and fear of failure are related to individuals' future career choices and career planning. The presence of this anxiety becomes particularly evident with the anxiety felt in the face of occupational uncertainties and indecisions (Fouad et al., 2010). When individuals struggle to make decisions, they may experience anxiety about potentially losing their capacity to make future choices. Consequently, anxiety can pose a detrimental obstacle to both career decision-making and career advancement (Tsai, Hsu & Hsu, 2017). Especially in the 21st century, in a labor market where job opportunities are unpredictable and unemployment is high, career anxiety may increase even more (Vignoli, 2015). Therefore, young people in transition can be considered an important group as their career decisions have long-term consequences (Söner & Yılmaz, 2022). In this context, career adaptation can help students manage career anxiety and has been associated with lower career anxiety (Creed et al., 2016; Xu et al., 2016). In short, career anxiety, which is affected by various factors such as decision-making difficulties, uncertainties, and individual insecurities, can significantly hinder career choices and development. Furthermore, an examination of the literature on career anxiety reveals a strong correlation with uncertainties and challenges in the decision-making processes regarding adolescents' career choices, personality traits, and difficulties in career decision-making (Creed et al., 2009; Hirschi, 2012; Söner, 2020). This research indicates that career worry might adversely affect adolescents' psychological well-being and academic achievement.

## The Present Study

Adolescence is a critical stage in the identity development process of individuals. In this process, decisions about the future, especially career-related ones, are important. Career anxiety may reflect the uncertainty and fears of young people in this period about their future career choices. This may affect students' career adaptation and optimism levels during the transition to university. Savickas (2013) emphasizes the role of emotional and cognitive factors in adolescents' career-related decision-making processes. Accordingly, while individuals with high career anxiety experience difficulties in career adaptability, their optimism levels may also be negatively affected. In particular, Perry et al. (2001) stated that career anxiety negatively affects adolescents' adaptation to career development processes, and this situation becomes more evident during the transition period to university. Again, Creed and Patton (2003) presented findings supporting the negative relationship between career anxiety and career adaptability in adolescents. These studies show that adolescents' career adaptability and optimism levels shape their motivation and success toward their future career goals.

This study aimed to determine whether career anxiety predicts career adaptability and optimism of high school seniors who want to transition to university. Given the significant life transition that senior high school students undergo, the research holds crucial importance. As they face the decision-making process for university education and future career paths, it becomes very important to understand the factors affecting their career adaptability and optimism. At this point, this study will illuminate the psychological dimensions of career decision-making by examining levels of career anxiety experienced by senior high school students and their potential effect on their career adaptability and optimism. By doing so, it aims to identify potential interventions to assist senior high school students in their transition to university and career planning. The study's findings are anticipated to enrich existing literature on career development and guide educational institutions, career counselors, and policymakers regarding the importance of addressing career anxiety among senior high school students. Despite the growing interest in career adaptability and optimism among adolescents, there is a limited body of empirical research that specifically examines the predictive role of career anxiety, particularly its dimensions of family influence and vocational indecision, on these constructs in the critical period of career transition from high school to university. This study uniquely addresses this gap by integrating psychological and contextual factors influencing adolescents' career development processes, offering a nuanced understanding of how career anxiety can undermine adaptability and optimism in an understudied population. With this perspective in mind, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. Do career adaptability, optimism, and career anxiety significantly differ among senior high school students based on gender?
2. Do career adaptability, optimism, and career anxiety significantly differ among senior high school students based on school type?
3. Is there a significant correlation between career adaptability, optimism, and career anxiety among senior high school students?
4. Do senior high school students' career anxieties significantly predict their career adaptability and optimism?



## Method

### Research Model

This study employed a predictive correlational model to assess how much career anxiety predicts career adaptability and optimism among high school senior students preparing for the transition to university. Predictive correlational model studies analyze the relationships between variables and predict one variable based on another. In such studies, the known variable is referred to as the predictor variable, while the variable whose value is to be determined is termed the criterion variable (Büyüköztürk, 2023; Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2011). In this study, the predictor variable was career anxiety, and the criterion variable was career adaptability and optimism. This model was preferred because it enables the examination of the extent to which an independent psychological construct (career anxiety) can statistically predict outcome variables (career adaptability and optimism) in a natural setting without manipulating any conditions, which aligns with the non-experimental design of the study.

### Study Group

This study used purposive sampling to determine the career anxiety levels that predict the career adaptability and optimism of senior high school students who want to transfer to university. The purposive sampling method is a method in which individuals with specific, limited, and generally purposeful characteristics are selected (Güriş & Astar, 2019). The research was conducted in 20 high schools in a developing district of Istanbul, which receives immigrants from different provinces of Turkey. There are a total of 13,025 students in these high schools. Volunteer students were selected for the study among the students planning to transfer from high school to university. According to Sekaran (1992), in groups with a population between 10,000 and 25,000, the theoretical sample size should be 244 in homogeneous groups and 377 in non-homogeneous groups, using a margin of error of .05. In this study, a total of 954 students were reached. Forty-six of these students were excluded from the analysis because they were found to be outliers using the Mahalanobis method, and 12 data points were excluded because they provided incomplete information. Analyses were conducted with the remaining 896 data points. Of the students who participated in the study, 462 (51.6%) were female, and 434 (48.4%) were male. In addition, 187 (20.9%) of the students were studying in vocational high schools, 133 (14.8%) in Imam Hatip high schools, and 576 (64.3%) in Anatolian high schools.

### Data Collection Tool

#### *Career Adaptability and Optimism Scale*

Erdoğan-Zorver and Korkut-Owen introduced a scale in 2014 designed to assess career adaptability and optimism among students transitioning from higher education into the workforce. The scale demonstrated strong reliability and validity indicators, including a high internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .93$ ) and acceptable fit indices. Formatted as a five-point Likert scale, it spans a scoring range from 18 to 90. Tailored initially for university attendees, this investigation reassessed its validity and reliability for application among high school students. The reassessment confirmed the scale's unidimensional framework with item loadings extending from .570 to .785 and fit indices ([CFI= .913, RMR= .05, RMSEA= .08, GFI= .90, SRMR= .053]) remaining robust. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for this study was .94, indicating high reliability. These results affirm the scale's applicability to a high school audience.

### ***Career Anxiety Scale***

The Career Anxiety Scale, created by Çetin-Gündüz and Nalbantoğlu-Yılmaz (2016), aims to assess the anxiety levels of high school students across several phases of their career development. The scale includes items addressing anxiety associated with both family influence and career decision-making. It employs a five-point Likert-type format, yielding reliable and valid results in adolescent populations. In the current study, the internal consistency of the overall scale and its subdimensions was found to be high, confirming its appropriateness for measuring career anxiety among high school seniors. The current study reported a Cronbach's alpha of .860, with the family influence component at .85 and the career choice anxiety component at .81, thereby validating its reliability for evaluating profession-related anxiety in high school students.

### **Data Collection**

Due to the research group comprising individual participants under 18, parental consent was secured, and data collection occurred in person. Before data collection, the study's goal and the methods were elucidated to the participants, after which the data were gathered.

### **Data Analyses**

Correlation and standard multiple regression analyses were employed to examine how career anxiety levels forecast vocational adaptability and optimism in high school seniors preparing to transition to university. The analyses were conducted using SPSS 25.0, whereas JAMOWI was employed to determine the 95% confidence intervals of the correlation values. Correlation is a statistical method that assesses the relationship between two or more variables, including the direction and strength of this relationship (Cohen et al., 2003). In contrast, standard multiple regression analysis is a statistical technique utilized to investigate how a dependent variable is influenced by various independent variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Fundamental prerequisites for executing multiple regression analysis encompass the requirement that variables be measured on an interval scale with a normal distribution, the absence of autocorrelation, independence among predictor variables to prevent elevated inter-variable correlation, and the presence of a linear and significant relationship between predictors and outcomes (Can, 2023). Assessments of kurtosis and skewness were performed to verify normal distribution. The analysis indicated that the dataset resides within the acceptable normalcy range of +1 to -1, as illustrated in Table 1 (Morgan, 2017).

The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance metrics are utilized in regression analysis to detect multicollinearity. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) measures the extent of connection between a specific independent variable and other independent variables. An elevated VIF indicates the presence of multicollinearity (Kutner et al., 2005). In regression analysis, tolerance is the inverse of the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). Low tolerance values signify heightened multicollinearity, compromising regression coefficient reliability (Field, 2013). The Durbin-Watson test is utilized to assess autocorrelation in the regression model. The results of this test elucidate the presence of dependency among consecutive error components within the model (Durbin & Watson, 1951). This study assessed the Durbin-Watson d-value to detect autocorrelation. The value of 1.623 was found to be within the acceptable range, as Field (2013) noted. The variance inflation factor and tolerance values were evaluated during the third stage. The variance inflation factor was determined to be 1.310, which is below the threshold of 10. The tolerance value was determined to be 0.763, falling within the acceptable range Field (2013)

established. The results in Table 3 indicate correlational relationships between the predictor and predicted variables.

The present study used a t-test to assess the potential significant differences in career adaptability, optimism, and anxiety based on gender. An ANOVA test was also employed to examine possible differences in these variables based on school type. The t-test is a parametric statistical procedure employed to compare the means of two groups. It functions under normal distribution and variance homogeneity, as Cohen (1988) articulated. The data in Table 4 indicates a normal statistical distribution. Furthermore, the F test for variance homogeneity revealed that the variances had unequal distributions. Büyüköztürk (2023) posits that in cases where the sample sizes are nearby, it is customary for the variances to exhibit spatial inequality. Hence, due consideration was given to the disparity in value.

The ANOVA test compares means between three or more groups and requires the assumptions of independent groups, normal distribution, and homogeneity of variance. These tests determine the significance of differences between groups by assuming that data are typically distributed and variances are equal. Again, Bonferroni correction was used to control false-positive results in multiple comparisons. This correction divided the significance level by the number of comparisons made, and the p-value was recalculated (Field, 2013). This new value was found to be .0167 at a .05 significance level. It was seen that the findings obtained with this value were not significant.

## Results

An independent sample t-test was performed to investigate significant gender differences in career anxiety, adaptability, and optimism among high school seniors planning to move to university, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. T-test findings regarding the gender variable

	Variable	N	$\bar{x}$	Ss	Df	t	p
Career adaptability and optimism	Female	462	38.63	12.85	894	1.208	227
	Male	434	39.71	13.83			
Career anxiety	Female	462	45.71	12.94	894	2.551	.011*
	Male	434	47.97	13.58			

As depicted in Table 1, the analysis revealed that there were no significant differences in career adaptability and optimism among high school seniors aspiring to transition to university based on gender [ $t_{(894)} = 1.208, p > .05$ ]. In addition, it was found that the career anxiety of senior high school students who wanted to make a career transition to university differed significantly according to gender [ $t_{(894)} = 2.551, p < .05$ ]. Male students ( $\bar{x} = 47.97$ ) had substantially higher career anxiety than female students ( $\bar{x} = 45.71$ ).

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was utilized to examine the levels of career adaptability, optimism, and anxiety among high school seniors preparing for university transition, which significantly differ by school type, as presented in Table 2.



Table 2. Analysis findings according to the school type variable

	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean of Squares	F	p	Significant Difference
Career adaptability and optimism	Between Groups	282,783	2	141,392	,794	,452	
	Within Groups	159040,65	893	178,097			
	Total	159323,43	895				
Career anxiety	Between Groups	138,214		69,107	,390	,677	
	Within Groups	158135,82	893	177,084			
	Total	158274,03	895				

\* $p < .05$ 

The results of the study indicate that there were no significant differences in career adaptability and optimism ( $F_{(2,193)} = .794, p > .05$ ) and career anxiety ( $F_{(2,193)} = .390, p > .05$ ) among senior high school students who expressed a desire to move to university, based on the variable of school type. The values of career adaptability and optimism ( $F_{(2,193)} = .794, p > .0167$ ), as well as career anxiety ( $F_{(2,193)} = .390, p > .0167$ ), among senior high school students who expressed a desire to transition to university, did not show any significant differences based on the school type variable after applying the Bonferroni correction.

A Pearson Correlation Analysis investigated the relationship between career anxiety and career adaptability optimism of high school seniors intending to transition to university.

Table 3. Descriptive analyses and Correlational Analyses

Variables	M	Df	Skew.	Curt.	1	2	3	4	Confidence Intervals	
									95% CI Upper	95% CI Lower
1. CAO	39.15	13.34	.390	.307	1					
2. CA	46.80	13.30	.276	.409	-,408**	1			-.271	-.388
3. FI	28.16	9.72	.470	.717	-,331**	,770**	1		-.313	-.426
4. CV	18.65	5.51	.321	.526	-,370**	,932**	,487**	1	.352	-.461

Note: CAO: Career Adaptability and Optimism; CA: Career Anxiety; FI: Family Impact; CV: Choice of Vocational

The correlation analysis results in Table 3 indicate significant correlations between career adaptability and optimism (CAO), career anxiety (CA), family impact (FI), and vocational choice (CV). A substantial negative correlation was identified between professional adaptability and both optimism and career anxiety ( $r = -0.408, p < .01$ ), with the 95% confidence range (-0.271, -0.388) validating the statistical importance of this relationship. Negative and significant associations were identified between professional adaptability and both optimism and family impact ( $r = -0.331, p < .01$ ) and choice of vocation ( $r = -0.370, p < .01$ ), with 95% confidence intervals of (-0.313, -0.426) and (-0.352, -0.461), respectively. Conversely, robust positive relationships were identified between professional anxiety and family impact ( $r = 0.770, p < .01$ ) and vocational choice ( $r = 0.932, p < .01$ ), with 95% confidence ranges of (-0.313, -0.426) and (-0.352, -0.461), respectively. The results suggest that persons with elevated professional anxiety are more susceptible to familial influence and encounter increased uncertainty in vocational decision-making. The notable and significant association between family impact and vocational choice ( $r = 0.487, p < .01$ ) indicates that individuals are substantially influenced by their families in career decision-making. The findings suggest that self-efficacy, optimism, family support, and anxiety levels collectively influence individuals' career growth and professional decision-making.

A standard multiple regression analysis was performed to assess how career anxiety influences career adaptability and optimism among high school seniors planning their transition to university. The outcomes are documented in Table 4.

Table 4. The results obtained from the standard regression analysis

	<b>B</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b><math>\beta</math></b>	<b>T</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Binary r</b>	<b>Partial R</b>
(Instant)	58,681	1,552		37,801	0,000		
1. Family Impact	-0,478	0,085	-0,197	-5,646	0,000	-0,331	-0,186
2. Choice of Vocational	-0,377	0,048	-0,274	-7,849	0,000	-0,370	-0,254
R= .41	R <sup>2</sup> = .16						
F <sub>(2,893)</sub> = 89.498	p= .000						

Reviewing Table 4 reveals a moderate association between the aspects of family impact and choice of vocational choice, identified as components of career anxiety among high school seniors aiming for university transition, with an R-value of 0.409 and R<sup>2</sup> of 0.165, indicating significance at  $p < .05$ . These components, family impact and choice of vocational, account for roughly 16% of the variation in career adaptability and optimism. This indicates that while these two factors play a meaningful role, a substantial portion (approximately 84%) of the variance remains unexplained. This suggests that other personal, contextual, or environmental variables—such as self-efficacy, peer influence, socioeconomic status, or school support systems—may contribute significantly to students' career adaptability and optimism. The standardized regression coefficients ( $\beta$ ) highlight that, regarding career adaptability and optimism, the order of importance among predictors is led by choice of vocational followed by family impact. Analysis of t-test results on the regression coefficients' significance shows that family impact and career choice as meaningful predictors of career adaptability and optimism.

## Discussion

For this research, a purposive sampling approach was employed to explore how career anxiety influences career adaptability and optimism among high school seniors considering a transition to university. Initial findings indicated no significant gender-based differences in career adaptability and optimism among these students. A review of existing literature revealed that, across various study groups, gender does not significantly affect levels of career adaptability and optimism (Başer, 2021; Erus & Zeren, 2017; Gül et al., 2019; Hirschi, 2009; Kalafat, 2018; Santilli et al., 2014; Sartık, 2020; Şentürk, 2019; Türkmen, 2021). These findings support the results of the study. In addition, it has been observed that there are findings in the literature that career adaptability and optimism significantly differ by gender (Balkan, 2018; Coetzee & Harry, 2014; Genç & Fidan, 2019; Han & Rojewski, 2015; Harry & Coetzee, 2013; Hartung, Porfeli, & Vondrack, 2004; Kaya, 2020; Sarsıkoğlu, 2019; Taş & Alparslan, 2020), and the findings do not support the research results. Most students studying in the schools in the region where the study was conducted are children of families who migrated from Anatolia. This shows that the cultural and social contexts of the students may be similar regardless of gender. Therefore, the lack of a difference in career adaptability and optimism levels by gender may be due to these everyday cultural and social experiences. Furthermore, the analysis revealed a significant difference in career anxiety among high school seniors aiming to transition to university based on gender. This may be attributed to gender-specific societal expectations, particularly in traditional communities, where males are often expected to assume economic responsibility earlier. Such cultural norms may increase the pressure and perceived consequences of career decisions for male students, thereby intensifying their career-related anxiety. However, when reviewing existing literature, it is noted that findings suggest career anxiety does not significantly vary by gender (Akbaş, 2019; Çiçek, 2022; Karakaş, 2021; Samancı, 2023; Uçar, 2020; Vignoli, 2015), which supports the results of this research. In addition, the findings in the literature that career anxiety differs significantly according to gender (Can Göl, 2023; Daniels et al., 2011; Kızılkaya, 2012; Zhou & Santos, 2007) do not overlap with the findings of non-differentiation according to gender obtained in the study. The reasons why male adolescents have higher career concerns than female adolescents can be related to social expectations and gender-based role norms. Since males are traditionally expected to provide for their families and be more successful in their careers, this may increase their level of career-related anxiety (Gati & Saka, 2001). In addition, research has shown that male adolescents' perception that they should make career decisions more independently and independently of their families also increases anxiety (Fouad & Walker, 2005). These social pressures and expectations may cause males to have higher career concerns than females.

The investigation revealed that levels of career adaptability and optimism among high school seniors planning to transition to university were relatively similar by school type. The literature review showed a need for studies addressing career adaptability and optimism from the perspective of school type. This uniformity in education likely shapes similar levels of career adaptation and optimism among students. Additionally, the study found no significant difference in career anxiety among high school seniors transitioning to university based on school type, which aligns with existing literature findings, suggesting that school type does not significantly affect career anxiety levels (Ciminli, 2023; Gürgân & Beler, 2021; Samancı, 2023). However, some studies have reported significant differences in career anxiety levels across school types (Karakaş, 2021; Kayadibi, 2019; Nalbantoğlu Yılmaz & Çetin Gündüz, 2018; Öztemel, 2012), and the present findings appear to diverge from those. This discrepancy may be explained by the relatively homogenous academic and demographic composition of the sample in this study. The discrepancy

in results could be attributed to the study's participant pool, which exclusively consisted of students from Anatolian high schools, religious vocational high schools, and vocational-technical high schools. Considering recent educational system changes, wherein many Anatolian high schools admit students based on residential addresses rather than academic performance, students' academic profiles and future expectations across these school types may have become increasingly similar. Furthermore, the schools were in a district characterized by socioeconomic disadvantage and high internal migration rates. This may further reduce differentiation in students' career-related attitudes, resources, and perceived opportunities. This similarity in academic profiles across school types may contribute to the absence of significant differences in career concerns among students.

The analysis indicated a negative and moderately significant correlation between high school seniors' career adaptability and optimism and their overall career anxiety, including a moderately significant correlation between their career adaptability and optimism and their overall career anxiety, including family influence and career choice. This suggests that as career anxiety in students preparing for university transition escalates, their career adaptability and optimism tend to decline. In particular, the variables of familial influence and career selection, which are constituents of career anxiety, accounted for approximately 16% of the variance seen in career adaptability and optimism. The examination of t-test results pertaining to the statistical significance of regression coefficients has revealed that familial impact and career choice play vital roles in predicting career flexibility and optimism. A comprehensive examination of the available literature indicated a dearth of research examining the association between career anxiety and the twin constructs of career flexibility and optimism.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

In conclusion, this study aimed to determine whether the level of career anxiety predicts career adaptability and optimism among high school seniors planning to transfer to university. This study identified several limitations. First, considering the specific composition of the participant group, the fact that science high school students were omitted, and the sample size was smaller compared to previous studies, is one of the important limitations that may explain the differences in the findings. In this context, a larger and more diverse sample could be used in future research by including science high schools and other types of high schools. Secondly, the fact that the study was conducted by collecting data from schools in the Arnavutköy district of Istanbul province is another important factor that limits the generalizability of the findings. Although the Arnavutköy district is a region with a rapidly growing population due to new immigration, it is limited in terms of the characteristics of the group it represents. Therefore, in future studies, the generalizability of the findings can be increased by collecting data from different districts of Istanbul and other regions with different socioeconomic structures. Diversifying the demographic variables used in the study is also recommended. Other demographic factors that may affect career adaptability and optimism (e.g., family income, parents' education level, students' academic achievement levels) can be included in the study for more detailed analysis. In addition, the impact of personal (e.g., self-efficacy, motivation) and situational (e.g., school support, family support) factors that affect career adaptability and optimism can also be addressed, and research on these issues can be deepened. To corroborate or expand upon the findings of this study, longitudinal research should be undertaken to investigate the temporal variations in the impact of career anxiety on career adaptability and optimism. Such investigations may enhance understanding of the correlation between career anxiety, career adaptability, and optimism.

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### **Conflicts of Interest**

I declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this study.

### **Ethics**

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University on February 16, 2024 (Decision No: 2024/01).



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