

The Effect of Nepotism Perception on Career Anxiety of University Students and New Graduates: A Multiple Group Analysis

Nepotizm Algısının Üniversite Öğrencilerinin ve Yeni Mezunların Kariyer Kaygısı Üzerindeki Etkisi: Çoklu Grup Analizi

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Özet

Çalışma, üniversitelerin lisans programı son sınıf öğrencileri ve bu programlardan yeni mezun olanların nepotizm algılarının kariyer kaygıları üzerindeki etkisini araştırmak ve bu etkinin demografik faktörlere göre nasıl farklılaştığını ölçmek amacıyla yapılmıştır. Çalışmada, nicel araştırma yöntemlerinden kesitsel araştırma yöntemi ve kolayda örnekleme tekniği kullanılmıştır. Araştırma 448 katılımcı ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Katılımcılar, dört yükseköğretim kurumunda kayıtlı ve yeni mezun olmuş öğrencilerden oluşmaktadır. Analiz aşamasında öncelikle var olduğu düşünülen ilişkilerin veri ile uyumlu olup olmadığının tespit edilmesi amacıyla yapısal eşitlik modellemesi yapılmış, daha sonra gruplar arasındaki farklılıklar da çoklu grup analizi ile test edilmiştir. Analiz sonuçlarına göre, nepotizm algısının kariyer kaygısı üzerindeki etkisinde cinsiyete göre; kadın katılımcılarda nepotizm algısının sadece mesleki kariyer kaygısını etkilediği; erkek katılımcılarda ise hem mesleki hem de aile temelli kariyer kaygısını etkilediği belirlenmiştir. Hanenin gelir düzeyi dikkate alındığında, düşük hane halkı gelirin sahip olan katılımcılarda nepotizm algısının aile temelli kariyer kaygısını etkilediği; daha yüksek hane halkı gelirin sahip olan katılımcıların ise nepotizm algısının mesleki ve aile temelli kariyer kaygısı üzerinde etkisi bulunmadığı tespit edilmiştir. Ebeveyn tutumuna bakıldığında ise otoriter ailelerde katılımcıların nepotizm algısı aile temelli kariyer kaygısını etkilerken; demokratik ailelerde mesleki kariyer kaygısını etkilemektedir. Çalışılmak istenen sektöre göre bakıldığında da kamu sektörünü tercih etmeyi düşünen katılımcılarda nepotizm algısı hem mesleki hem de aile temelli kariyer kaygısını etkilerken; özel, serbest ve akademik olarak kariyerlerini devam ettirmeyi düşünen katılımcılarda böyle bir etki ortaya çıkmamıştır. Dolayısıyla, bu çalışma ile nepotizm algısının kariyer kaygısı üzerindeki etkisinin, üniversitelerin son sınıf öğrencileri ve yeni mezunlar açısından, demografik faktörlere göre farklılaştığı ortaya konulmuştur.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Kariyer Kaygısı, Nepotizm, Demografik Özellikler, Üniversite Öğrencileri ve Yeni Mezunlar, Çoklu Grup Analizi

Abstract

The study was conducted to investigate the effect of nepotism perceptions on career concerns of final-year undergraduate students and recent graduates and to measure how this effect differs according to demographic factors. In the study, cross-sectional research method and convenience sampling technique were used as quantitative research methods. The study was conducted with 448 participants, who were students enrolled in four higher education institutions, and recent graduates. In the analysis phase, firstly, structural equation modeling was used to determine whether the relationships thought to exist were compatible with the data, and then the differences between the groups were tested with multiple group analysis. According to the results of the analysis, in the effect of nepotism perception on career anxiety, it was determined that nepotism perception affected only professional career anxiety in the female participants, while it affected both professional and family-based career anxiety in the male participants. Considering the income level of the household, it was found that the perception of nepotism affected family-based career anxiety in participants with low household income, while the perception of nepotism had no effect on occupational and family-based career anxiety in participants with higher household income. In terms of parental attitude, the perception of nepotism affected family-based career anxiety in authoritarian families, while it affected occupational career anxiety in democratic families. In terms of the desired sector of employment, while the perception of nepotism affected both professional and family-based career anxiety in participants who intend to work in the public sector, no such effect was found in participants who intend to continue their careers in private, freelance and academic sectors. The impact of nepotism perception on career anxiety varies according to demographic characteristics among senior students and recent graduates of universities.

Keywords: Career Anxiety, Nepotism, Demographic Attributes, University Students and Newly Graduates, Multiple Group Analysis

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Rapid developments in globalization, the economy, and technology lead to changes in the professional landscape. For example, developments in artificial intelligence, cloud computing and data mining have increased the need for employees with high-level knowledge and skills in these fields. As a result of globalization, individuals have the opportunity to evaluate career opportunities in other countries besides their own. According to the results of Youthall's survey conducted with 1,558 young people in Türkiye in 2023, young people now want to continue their careers in institutionalized and global companies. This continuous evolution necessitates individuals to constantly enhance their abilities and skills, consequently diversifying career opportunities. However, this dynamic also raises concerns regarding career planning and amplifies career anxiety, particularly among university students. This is because a lack of career planning is a factor that exacerbates career anxiety (Nalbantoğlu Yılmaz & Çetin Gündüz, 2018). In today's world, there is prevalent concern about the ability to secure a prosperous future. According to the results of The Readiness Index (2022) in the United States, the United Kingdom and France, more than half (55%) of young people aged 18-24 are anxious about taking the next step in their career, with 33% saying they cannot control the next step in their career. Attaining a good quality of life and earning respect are heavily reliant on securing a good job. Therefore, career anxiety represents one of the most profound sources of stress for university students and recent graduates (Gallagher, 1992, as cited in Takil & Sari, 2021).

Nepotism, favoring political and personal connections, also escalates career anxiety. This is due to the disregard of an individual's education, experience, talents, and skills when employment is secured solely through connections. Leaving those without such connections to face heightened career anxiety. Thus, career decision-making and nepotism are two factors that profoundly influence individuals' work lives and their professional progression. Literature demonstrates that both the perception of nepotism (Gazeloğlu et al., 2018; Pelit et al., 2017) and career anxiety (Darwish et al., 2021; Göncü Akbaş, 2019; Kim et al., 2022; Şama, 2020) are influenced by demographic characteristics. Nonetheless, the literature review indicates a lack of studies addressing these two variables in tandem and analyzing them with respect to demographic factors.

This study employs multiple group analyses to analyze these effects on those who are just starting their career pathways. Its goal is to determine whether characteristics such as gender, parental attitudes, intended employment sectors, and income level affect nepotism's impact on career anxiety in young adults.

This investigation stands out in its focus on these parameters and promises to offer substantial contributions to the field. There is no study in the literature that addresses the effect of career anxiety on nepotism and tests the difference of

this effect according to demographic factors. In this study, the difference according to demographic factors is tested with multiple group analysis. The originality of the study stems from the difference in the analysis method. It is thought to fill an important gap in the literature. Within this framework, literature pertinent to hypothesis formation is scrutinized, followed by a detailed presentation of the study's methodology, findings, and implications.

Career Anxiety

Anxiety is a negative emotional state that arises in response to the prospect of an uncertain threat (Rachman, 2013). Career anxiety specifically denotes the adverse emotions that surface during various phases of an individual's career decision-making process and within their professional lives (Fouad, 2007; Saka et al., 2008). It manifests in situations where there is uncertainty or perceived threat concerning one's career path (Pisarik et al., 2017).

Career anxiety encompasses the stages of career exploration, development, and decision-making (Creed & Hennessy, 2016; Pisarik et al., 2017; Saka et al., 2008; Tsai et al., 2017). Individuals grappling with career indecision frequently struggle to make choices, and this hesitation fosters an anxious disposition. As a result of this anxiety, individuals find it challenging to refine their decision-making skills, leading to a tendency to shun making definitive career decisions (Tsai et al., 2017). This dynamic can be described as a self-perpetuating cycle: the inability to make a decision exacerbates the anxiety, which in turn poses a significant barrier to decision-making. Consequently, anxiety impairs the processes of career decision-making and development (Goodstein, 1995; Tsai et al., 2017). Anxiety can impact individuals at all stages of society, representing a detrimental factor for students ranging from primary education to postgraduate levels (Zeidner, 2007). While it may be considered typical for university students to experience career anxiety, the persistence of this negative state without resolution becomes problematic. For instance, studies have indicated that university students grappling with career uncertainty often exhibit lower Grade Point Averages (GPAs) compared to their decisive counterparts (Daniels et al., 2011; Graunke & Woosley, 2005). Although some students at various stages of career development might have already identified their career path, there remains a cohort who are yet to decide. Fouad (2007) has highlighted that individuals who face challenges in making career choices are more prone to experience anxiety. Gordon (1998) defines career anxiety as the condition that arises when an individual is seriously indecisive or persistently incapable of committing to a career choice. Research focusing on career anxiety among university students has typically centered on the aspects of career decision-making and indecision (Brown & Rector, 2008; Daniels et al., 2006; Miller & Rottinghaus, 2014).



Career and future anxieties, irrespective of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, significantly influence university students' daily lives and academic experiences (Gordon & Steele, 2015; Pisarik et al., 2017; Shin & Lee, 2019). The presence of unresolved career anxiety and indecision can lead to a diminished commitment to their chosen careers, lower levels of job satisfaction, and a reduced ability to actively contribute to society, despite their substantial educational achievements (Daniels et al., 2011). The root causes of career anxiety among university students are often linked to the fear of disappointing their family, the possibility of failure, and the potential of alienating friends due to career obligations (Vignoli et al., 2005). Consequently, anxiety related to career choices and indecision acts as a significant barrier to effective decision-making (Germeijs et al., 2006; Saka & Gati, 2007).

Nepotism

Nepotism is a form of corruption with historical roots. Documentary evidence reveals that various nepotistic practices occurred and were prevalent in different parts of the world throughout history (Çarıkçı & Arslan, 2010). The term, which carries a negative implication, originates from the Renaissance period. In that period popes were known to appoint their nephews to high-level clerical positions, disregarding their qualifications and personal merits. The negative impact of this practice on the efficiency of the church and the morale of the clergy without such connections has been pivotal in perpetuating the term's significance up to the present day (Ford & McLaughlin, 1985).

Derived from the Latin word "nepot" (nephew), the term "nepotism" is defined as favoritism towards relatives and close friends (Abdalla et al., 1998). The concept of nepotism, extensively discussed in the literature, is categorized into different forms: "nepotism" when based on familial ties (Özsemerci, 2003; Gyimah-Boadi, 2000), "cronyism" when it involves favoritism towards friends or spouses (Khatri & Tsang, 2003; Özsemerci, 2003), "tribalism" when it concerns the preference of tribe or clan members (Loewe et al., 2007; Pope, 2000), "patronage" when it pertains to political, ideological, or religious affiliations (Özsemerci, 2003), and "clientelism" when it refers to favoritism towards those in positions of power and their relatives (Keefer, 2007). Furthermore, Vanhanen (1999) explored the concept of nepotism within an ethnic framework, considering it an expanded form of nepotism in his study on ethnicization. Ethnic nepotism, rooted in evolutionary theory and analyzed from a socio-biological perspective, is elucidated through the mutual support and kinship relations among individuals. It is suggested that cohesion through shared race, nation, religion, and language can be influential in mitigating the effects of nepotism.

Nepotism is generally defined as the practice of hiring individuals for positions by overlooking their personal attributes, skills, educational background, and

competencies, and considering solely their political and personal connections (Özsemerci, 2003). Such behavior is a prevalent model in organizations (Araslı et al., 2006; Keleş et al., 2011). Nepotistic practices, which are influential in the recruitment and promotion processes, lead to numerous negative consequences for both the organization and its employees. Employees selected through nepotism often lack job-related competencies and underperform compared to their skilled counterparts who are selected on merit (Araslı & Tümer, 2008). Consequently, this creates a perception of inequity among employees, fostering the belief that there is a disparity between their work contribution and their remuneration, and that they are part of an unfair work environment (Büte, 2011). As a result, the engagement and output of other employees not benefiting from nepotism may be adversely affected.

Nepotism, commonly perceived as prevalent in the private sector, is equally entrenched in the public domain. It involves the allocation and reservation of certain positions for individuals with specific political and/or personal ties (Chassamboulli & Gomes, 2021). The Constitution of the Republic of Türkiye stipulates that "all individuals are equal before the law irrespective of language, race, color, gender, political thought, philosophical belief, religion, denomination, and other such reasons" (Article 10). Accordingly, employment policies in public institutions should be established and executed on the basis of equality, adhering to this constitutional mandate. Instances of nepotism, particularly in the public sector, blatantly contravene this constitutional provision. Consequently, as a part of its employment policy, the state should implement the principle of meritocracy rigorously in the public sphere, ensuring that it is free from any ambiguity or doubt in the public's mind. Moreover, Özgener (2002) underscores the imperative to foster a social moral ethos and for the community to embrace and embody a moral standard centered on social ethics rather than individualistic interests. It is through the impeccable functioning of such societal moral norms that a universally endorsed meritocratic principle can be effectively realized.

Related Studies in the Literature

In this section, the relationships between the variables discussed are presented. Early studies on nepotism concentrated on how managers or employees perceived its presence in their organizations (Ford & McLaughlin, 1985). Over time, scholarly attention has shifted to examining the impact of nepotism on employees' attitudes and behaviors (Agarwal, 2016). Research has identified a strong link between nepotism and career anxiety. Agun et al. (2021), through interviews with 37 individuals, found that nepotism significantly contributes to the escalation of career anxiety. This is corroborated by the work of Padgett and Morris (2005), who suggest that nepotism is perceived as an injustice, fostering negative sentiments towards those

hired through such means. Similarly, Araslı and Tümer (2008) found that nepotism plays a considerable role in the development of job stress. Furthermore, studies by Alwerthan (2016) and Rajpaul-Baptiste (2018) indicate that nepotism has detrimental effects on both beneficiaries, who may feel inadequate, and non-beneficiaries, who may see themselves as victims of unfair discrimination. Collectively, these findings support the notion that nepotism serves as a catalyst for increasing career anxiety among professionals.

H₁: Nepotism perception affects career anxiety.

Gender differences are associated with different behavioural and ethical structures that women and men exhibit in ethical decision-making processes (Loo, 2003). Some of these studies reveal that male employees are more prone to preferential treatment than female employees (Greenglass et al., 2001; Töyry et al., 2004; Iqbal & Ahmad, 2020). However, it is also argued that nepotism in an organization encourages male employees to show withdrawal behaviours as a reactive response to organizational politics more than female employees (Abubakar et al., 2017). In the literature, different results have been obtained in studies examining the relationship between nepotism and gender in different sectors.

Firstly, studies conducted in the public sector were analyzed. In their study conducted in Lithuania, Pedersen and Johannsen (2013) state that women tend to be more moderate towards nepotism than men and attribute this to women's stronger sense of responsibility towards family and relatives. Olabimitan and Alausa (2014) found that men are more likely than women to exhibit deviant behaviours in response to nepotism and politics in the workplace. Yasin et al. (2019), in their research in Pakistan, concluded that high-income families could more readily influence hiring processes in public institutions, thereby having an easier time securing jobs for their kin, indicating a propensity for nepotism.

The results of studies conducted in the private sector differ. Pelit et al. (2017) did not find a significant difference when comparing participants' perceptions of nepotism by gender in their study. However, Abubakar et al. (2017) found that men are more likely than women to engage in withdrawal behaviours in response to nepotism. Studies indicate that men tend to react to nepotism with more overt actions, such as deviant behaviour and job withdrawal, compared to women. Since female employees often possess less power within organizations, they may be more inclined to protect themselves by remaining silent in the face of nepotism (Jain et al., 2023).

The results of the study conducted on students are as follows. It would be appropriate to compare the career anxiety levels between male and female students, according to the study by Çetin Gündüz and Nalbantoğlu Yılmaz (2022), testing the measurement invariance of the career anxiety scale.

According to Değirmencioğlu (2022), gender differences are evident in the 'anxiety about career choice' sub-dimension of the career anxiety scale, with men scoring higher than women. However, Çalı and Doğar (2021), Darwish et al. (2021), Akbaş and Okutan (2020) and Yorulmaz (2019) found no significant difference between female and male students in terms of career anxiety.

However, the 'family influence' sub-dimension does not show gender variation. When examining the scale's sub-dimensions in relation to household income levels, significant differences were observed in 'family influence,' but not in 'anxiety about career choice.'

H₂: The effect of students' perceptions of nepotism on career anxiety differs according to gender (female or male).

In their study on university students, Deniz et al. (2013) found a connection between parental attitudes and students' subjective well-being and life satisfaction. The results indicate that democratic parental attitudes correlate positively with emotional well-being and life satisfaction, whereas protective and authoritarian parental attitudes correlate negatively. In a study examining the career anxiety levels of high school students based on demographic characteristics, Akbaş and Okutan (2020) found that children from families with democratic parenting styles experienced lower career anxiety compared to those from indifferent families.

H₃: The effect of students' perceptions of nepotism on career anxiety differs according to parental attitude (authoritarian-democratic-careless).

H₄: The effect of students' perceptions of nepotism on career anxiety differs according to the desired sector (private-public-freelance-academic).

Satu et al. (2019), exploring the connection between family income levels and stress in career decision-making, observed that children from middle-income families face more difficulties in making decisions compared to those from upper and lower income brackets. Darwish et al. (2021) concluded that when evaluating career anxiety relative to family income level, university students from low-income backgrounds experienced more career anxiety than their middle and high-income counterparts.

However, Yorulmaz (2019) and Çalı and Doğar (2021) reported no significant differences in career anxiety levels attributable to income.

H₅: The effect of students' perceptions of nepotism on career anxiety differs according to the household's income level (low-medium-high-high).



■ **Figure 1.** Research model.

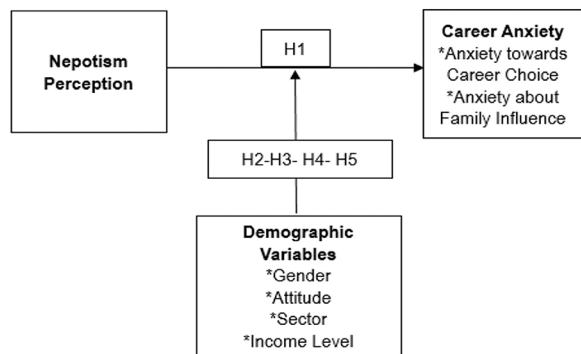


Figure 1 represents the research model and hypothesized relations between nepotism perception, career anxiety, and demographic variables.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The study sample consisted of senior students studying in ten different programs in the faculties of economic and administrative sciences of four higher education institutions in the Western Black Sea Region. Due to the size of the research population, 384 participants are considered to be sufficient for the sample size with a 5% margin of error at 95% confidence interval (Yazıcıoğlu & Erdoğan, 2014). In addition, as Hair et al. (2014) stated in their study, the condition of having at least ten samples for each statement on the scale is also met. Reaching 549 participants for 16 statements was considered sufficient by the authors. This study was prepared in accordance with the rules of scientific research and publication ethics with Kastamonu University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Board Approval Certificate dated 12/04/2022 and numbered 2022/43/04.

The data for the study were collected between May and July 2022 from students in their final year at university and recent graduates. An online questionnaire form was used to collect the data. The introduction section of the questionnaire form included general information informing the participants. Participants were not asked any questions to cover their personal information. Delivering online questionnaire forms to the participants provides more advantages in terms of time and cost (Karakoyun & Kavak, 2008). The questionnaire’s web page link was sent to 1245 students via online messaging applications. While determining the research sample, the convenience sampling technique was used by considering time and cost factors. Also, convenience sampling is frequently used in both qualitative and quantitative research as it facilitates access to participants (Suri, 2011). A total of 549 participant responses were provided. Thus, the response rate to the surveys was 44%. However, the data of 101

participants who incorrectly marked the control question in the questionnaire were not included in the analysis. As a result, the analyses were conducted on the data obtained from 448 questionnaires.

Data Collection Tools

Two different scales were utilized in the study. Asunakutlu and Avcı (2010) created a three-dimensional nepotism scale by utilizing the studies of Abdalla et al. (1998) and Ford and McLaughlin (1985). In this study, the nepotism in the recruitment process dimension (three statements, one dimension), which is one of the three dimensions of that scale, was used. The other two dimensions, nepotism in promotion and transaction nepotism, were not used in the study because the sample consisted of students who needed to be involved in business life. The second scale is the career anxiety scale that Çetin Gündüz and Nalbantoğlu Yılmaz (2018) developed. The scale consists of two dimensions and 13 statements. The first dimension is anxiety about career choice (nine statements), and the second dimension is anxiety about family influence (four statements). A 5-point Likert-type rating was used in the scales. The study asked about the student’s demographic information, such as gender, age, parental attitude, student status, household income level, and the sector where they would like to work.

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

The findings related to the demographic characteristics of the participants are given in ■ Table 1. When the demographic characteristics of the participants are examined, it is seen that 67% of the participants are female, 33% are male, 53.6% are between the ages of 21 and 25, 58.5% define their parents as democratic, 35.7% as authoritarian, 85.9% are active students, 61.8% plan to work in the public sector after graduation, and approximately 69% have low and low-medium household income.

■ **Table 1.** Demographic characteristics.

		F		F	
Gender	Women	300	Student Status	Graduate	63
	Man	148		Attending University	385
Age	20 and below	151	Sector	Private	69
	21-25	240		Public	277
	26-30	35		Freelance	29
	30 and above	22		Academic	73
Parental Attitude	Authoritarian	160	Household Income Level	Less	106
	Democratic	262		Less-Medium	202
	Careless	26		Middle	88
				High	52

Findings

SPSS and Amos statistical programmes were used to analyze the data obtained for the research. Firstly, 549 questionnaire data from the participants were transferred to the SPSS programme. 101 questionnaire data were cancelled due to the control question and the questionnaires not being filled in correctly; and the analysis was carried out with a total of 448 questionnaire data. Within the scope of the research, confirmatory factor analysis, path analysis, and multiple group analysis were conducted to test the overall measurement model. The findings of the study are presented below in order.

Factor Analysis of Scales

Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used in the reliability analysis of the scales used in the study, and factor analysis was used in the validity analysis. The results of the analyses are given in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2. Nepotism Perception Scale Factor Analysis and Reliability Analysis Results.

Factor Name	Items	Factor Loading	Explained Variance (%)	α
Nepotism Perception	N_1. Acquaintances are prioritized in recruitment processes.	,755	44,026	,656
	N_2. Those who have acquaintances in the recruitment process can handle the selection process.	,663		
	N_3. The references of the people in the management team are essential in the recruitment process.	,558		
Total Variances			44,026	
Kaiser-Meyer Olkin			,657	
Barlett test of sphericity			234,197	
Df			3	
P value			,000	

When the findings of the nepotism perception scale given in Table 2 are examined, it is seen that Cronbach's Alpha value of the scale is 0.656, and the KMO value is 0.657. According to Akgül and Çevik (2003), if Cronbach's alpha coefficient is $0.60 \leq \alpha < 0.80$, the scale is highly reliable. In addition, heterogeneous items and low number of items may cause low Cronbach's alpha value (Bademci, 2011; Cortina, 1998). According to the values related to the scale, it was determined that the data set was suitable for analysis, and the validity level of the scale was sufficient at the 0.05 level of significance (Çokluk et al., 2012).

Table 3. Career Anxiety Scale Factor Analysis and Reliability Analysis Results.

Factor Name	Items	Factor Loading	Explained Variance (%)	α
Anxiety towards Career Choice	CA_4. The thought of making a career choice causes me stress.	,807	42,696	,885
	CA_5. The fact that there are so many factors to consider in choosing a profession makes me uneasy.	,791		
	CA_9. The thought of being disappointed in the profession I will choose disturbs me.	,749		
	CA_3. I feel uneasy when I think about my professional future.	,743		
	CA_2. I am nervous about whether I will be happy in my profession.	,705		
	CA_6. I feel depressed when I think about the obstacles that may come my way in achieving my professional ideals.	,655		
Anxiety about Family Influence	CA_8. I worry that I cannot do the profession I want.	,626	12,556	,807
	CA_13. The idea of telling my family about my career plans causes me distress.	,833		
	CA_12. I worry that my family will be an obstacle to the profession I want to choose.	,747		
	CA_11. I worry that my family will not understand my professional plans.	,741		
Total Variances			55,253	
Kaiser-Meyer Olkin			,878	
Barlett test of sphericity			2060,103	
df			45	
P value			,000	



When the findings of the career anxiety scale given in Table 3 are examined, it is seen that the Cronbach's Alpha value of the scale is between 0.807 and 0.885, and the KMO value is 0.878. According to the matters related to the scale, it was determined that the data set was suitable for analysis, and the validity level of the scale was sufficient at a 0.05 level of significance.

Regarding the regular distribution test of the data, kurtosis, and skewness values are commonly used in social sciences (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2018). The kurtosis and skewness values between -2.0 and +2.0 mean the data are typically distributed (Gravetter et al., 2020). The skewness and kurtosis values of the factors in the research model are between - 2.0 and + 2.0. According to the values, it is seen that the data are normally distributed.

Structural Equation Analysis

In the analysis, structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis was used, which tests the conceptual model of the research and the hypotheses established within the scope of the study and also shows the complex relationships between the constructs (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). The relationship level between the research's theoretical model and the hypotheses was tested in this direction with structural equation modeling.

The goodness of fit indices, which are "absolute fit indices" such as Chi-Square (CMIN), Chi-Square/df, RMSEA, GFI, etc., which check the fit of the model with the sample data, and incremental fit indices such as CFI, TLI, and NFI values, etc., which compare the chi-square value with a reference model and work as rejecting the null hypothesis. The goodness of fit indices, incremental or comparative fit indices, are examined in two categories (Benli & Güney, 2022). Generally accepted in the literature, goodness-of-fit index values differ according to the number of statements and

sample size (Yaşlıoğlu, 2017). Hu and Bentler (1998) stated that RMSEA and SRMR values within the acceptable range can be considered sufficient for model fit. Within the scope of this study, as stated by Hu and Bentler (1998), RMSEA (0.05 < RMSEA ≤ 0.08) and SRMR (0.05 < SRMR ≤ 0.10) values and χ^2/df ($2 < \chi^2/df \leq 5$) values being within the prescribed ranges were considered as prerequisites for model fit.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Construct Validity

Before testing the conceptual model of the research and the hypotheses established within the scope of the study, the variables used in the research should be verified. The model's validity was tested using confirmatory factor analysis to test the convergent and divergent validity of the research variables from a holistic perspective (Gürbüz, 2019; Hair et al., 2014).

Figure 2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

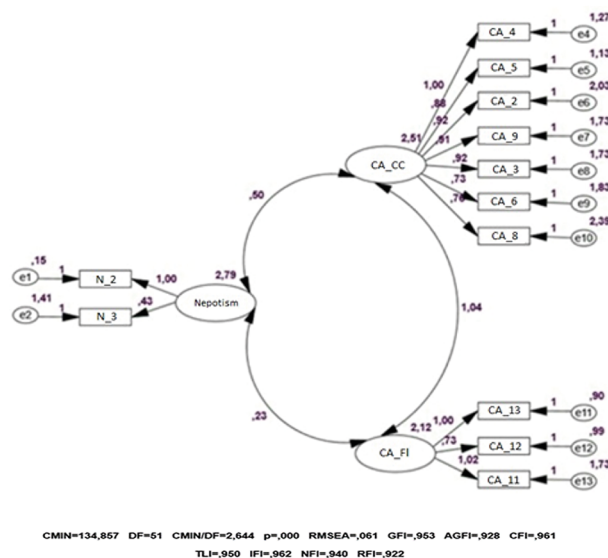


Table 4. Convergent and Divergent Validity Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

Factors	AVE	Standardized Factor Loadings CR	Convergent Validity		Divergent Validity			α	
			MSV	ASV	Square root AVE				
Anxiety towards Career Choice	1	CA_4	0,815	0,529	0,886	0,204	0,120	0,728	0,885
		CA_5	0,796						
		CA_2	0,716						
		CA_9	0,738						
		CA_3	0,743						
		CA_6	0,647						
		CA_8	0,616						
Anxiety about Family Influence	2	CA_13	0,838	0,747	0,817	0,204	0,106	0,864	0,807
		CA_12	0,731						
		CA_11	0,750						
Nepotism Perception	3	N_2	0,515	0,606	0,738	0,529	0,022	0,778	0,656
		N_3	0,973						

It was agreed that the convergent and divergent validity conditions were met based on the results in ■■ Tables 4 and 5. It was also clear that the goodness of fit index values from the confirmatory factor analysis in ■■ Table 6 were within acceptable ranges. According to the goodness of fit index values, it can be stated that the validity of the model to be analyzed is confirmed.

■ ■ **Table 5.**
Convergent Validity Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

Factors	Correlations between Factors		
	1	2	3
Anxiety towards Career Choice (1)	(0,728)		
Anxiety about Family Influence (2)	0,452	(0,864)	
Nepotism Perception (3)	0,187	0,093	(0,778)

The convergent and divergent validity tests and the integrated confirmatory factor analysis showed that the AVE value for the nepotism perception scale did not meet the AVE > 0.50 condition. Regarding model integrity, N_1 has the lowest loadings from the nepotism factor. Also, statements CA_1, CA_7 and CA_10 from the professional career anxiety factor were removed from the analysis (Hair et al., 2014). The integrated confirmatory factor analysis applied again after the excluded statements are given in ■■ Figure 2, goodness of fit index values are shown in ■■ Table 6, and convergent and divergent validity test results are given in ■■ Table 4 and ■■ Table 5. When ■■ Table 4 and ■■ Table 5 are examined, it is seen that all factors meet the AVE>0.50, CR>0.70, CR>AVE, and Reliability>AVE conditions for convergent validity. In addition, in terms of divergent validity, it is seen that all factors meet the conditions of MSV<AVE, ASV<AVE, Square Root AVE> inter-factor correlation. Again, regarding its divergent validity, it was determined that only the professional career anxiety factor did not meet the square root reliability condition. It is seen that the AVE values of the scales used in the study are not smaller than the MSV values, but the other condition of divergent validity, which is the condition that the MSV value is equal to or greater than the ASV value, is met. In the light of this information, it can be stated that one of the conditions of divergent validity is not met, while the other one meets the specified conditions. Therefore, it can be said that the scales used in the research meet the desired conditions for reliability and validity (Yaşlıoğlu, 2017; Hair et al., 2014).

■ ■ **Table 6.**
Confirmatory Factor Analysis Goodness of Fit Index Values.

Sample Size	N>250	448
Number of Observable Variables (gds)	gds ≥30	448/12= 37,33
CMIN (χ^2)	134,857	
P	Significant p-value	,000
Df		51
CMIN/df	$\chi^2 / df < 5$	2,644
GFI	> 0,90	,953
CFI	> 0,90	,961
TLI	> 0,80	,950
RMSEA	< 0,07	,061

SEM Measurement Model

After confirmatory factor analysis, the basic model of the research is tested. The tested model's goodness of fit index values are given in ■■ Table 7, and the measurement model analysis results are shown in ■■ Table 8. When ■■ Table 7 is examined, it is seen that the goodness of fit index values are within acceptable limits except for RMSEA. According to the goodness of fit index values, the model's relationships are consistent with the sample data, and the model is holistically valid and fits the data well.

■ ■ **Table 7.**
SEM Measurement Model Analysis Goodness of Fit Index Values.

Sample Size	N>250	448
Number of Observable Variables (gds)	gds ≥30	448/12= 37,33
CMIN (χ^2)		170,827
P	Significant p-value	,000
Df		49
CMIN/df	$\chi^2 / df < 5$	3,486
GFI	> 0,90	,943
CFI	> 0,90	,949
TLI	> 0,80	,932
RMSEA	< 0,07	,075

When ■■ Table 8 is examined, it is seen that the participants' perception of nepotism affects professional career anxiety at a significance level of 1% and the explanatory power of the equation ($R^2 = 0.022$), and this is a very strong effect. The structural equation reveals that a one-unit increase in the perception of nepotism will increase professional career anxiety by 0.438 units. In addition, it is seen that the participants' perception of nepotism affects family-based career anxiety at a 5% significance level and the explanatory power of the equation ($R^2 = 0.052$).



Table 8.

Results of Measurement Model Analysis.

	Path	Regression Coefficients Beta	Standardized Regression Coefficients Beta	S.E.	C.R.	P	R2
H ₁	CA_CC ← Nepotism	0,438	0,229	0,120	3,636	0,001*	0,022
	CA_FI ← Nepotism	0,330	0,149	0,134	2,455	0,014**	0,052
	Structural Equality	CA_CC= 0,438 x Nepotism					

The structural equation shows that a one-unit increase in the perception of nepotism will increase family-based career anxiety by 0.330 units. In line with this information, hypothesis H₁ is accepted.

Multiple Group Analysis

Multiple group analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses formed by the purpose of the study. The goodness of fit index values of the hypothesized models is presented in Table 9, and the results of the measurement model analysis are summarized in Table 10.

When Table 9 is examined, it is seen that the goodness of fit index values is generally within acceptable limits. Except for hypothesis H₂, the GFI value is not greater than .90 for the other hypotheses. Under normal conditions, CFI and GFI values greater than .90 indicate a good model fit. In contrast, these values may decrease in complex models (i.e., models with more than one latent factor and indicator) (de Frias & Dixon, 2005). The values given in Table 9 are generally good, indicating the good fit between the data and the model.

When Table 9 is examined in terms of hypothesis H₂, it is seen that only the perception of nepotism affects professional career anxiety for female participants (CR> ±1.96, P<0.05), while for male participants, the perception of nepotism affects both professional (CR> ±1.96, P<0.05) and family-based (CR> ±1.96, P<0.01) career anxiety.

Table 9.

Results of Measurement Model Analysis.

Hypothesis	H2	H3	H4	H5
Sample Size (N>250)	448	448	448	448
Number of Observable Variables (gds ≥30)	448/12= 37,33			
CMIN (χ ²)	254,807	346,151	386,767	387,045
P (Significant p-value)	,000	,000	,000	,000
df	104	156	208	208
CMIN/df (χ ² / df < 5)	2,450	2,219	1,859	1,861
GFI (> 0,90)	,916	,900	,882	,882
CFI (> 0,90)	,931	,913	,918	,921
TLI (> 0,80)	,912	,889	,896	,899
RMSEA (< 0,07)	,057	,052	,044	,044

When the structural equation is examined, it is seen that the perception of nepotism (0, 563) affects the professional-based career anxiety of female participants, and the explanatory power of the equation is (R² =0.023); the perception of nepotism (0.375) affects the professional-based career anxiety of male participants and the explanatory power of the equation is (R² =0.019); and the perception of nepotism (0.247) affects the family-based career anxiety, and the explanatory power of the equation is (R² =0.039).

Given these circumstances, while the perception of nepotism affects only professional career anxiety for female participants, the perception of nepotism affects both professional and family-based career anxiety for male participants. In the light of this information, H₂ is partially accepted.

In terms of hypothesis H₃, it is stated that the perception of nepotism affects family-based career anxiety (CR> ±1.96, P<0.01) for the participants who think that their families exhibit authoritarian attitudes; for the participants who believe that their families show democratic attitudes, it is stated that the perception of nepotism affects professional career anxiety (CR> ±1.96, P<0.001). Finally, it is seen that nepotism does not affect occupational or family-based career anxiety for participants who think their families are indifferent.

When the structural equation is examined, it is seen that the perception of nepotism (0,314) affects the family-based career anxiety of the participants who think that their families exhibit authoritarian attitudes. The explanatory power of the equation is (R² =0,012). The perception of nepotism (0,538) affects the professional career anxiety of the participants who think that their families exhibit democratic attitudes, and the explanatory power of the equation is (R² =0,012).

In this context, while the perception of nepotism increases family-based career anxiety in participants with families with authoritarian characteristics, the perception of nepotism does not affect family-based career anxiety in participants with families with democratic characteristics, but it affects professional career anxiety. It can be stated that families' attitudes towards individuals affect the type of effect of nepotism perception on career anxiety. In addition, the perception of nepotism does not affect occupational and family-based career anxiety in participants with families with indifferent attitudes towards individuals. In light of this information, H₃ is partially accepted.

In terms of hypothesis H₄, it is seen that the perception of nepotism affects both professional (CR> ±1.96, P<0.05) and family-based career anxiety (CR> ±1.96, P<0.05) for participants who intend to continue their careers in the public sector. On the other hand, it is seen that the perception of nepotism does not affect the professional- or family-based career anxiety of the participants who intend to continue their careers in other (private-freelance-academic) sectors.

When the structural equation is examined, it is seen that the perception of nepotism (0,426) affects the professional career anxiety of the participants who intend to continue their careers in the public sector. The explanatory power of the equation is (R²=0,039). The perception of nepotism (0,310) affects family-based career anxiety, and the explanatory power of the equation is (R²=0,067).

Table 10.
Measurement Model Analysis Results for Participants

			Path	Regression Coefficients Beta	Standardized Regression Coefficients Beta	S.E.	C.R.	P	R2
H ₂	Women	CA_CC	← Nepotism	0,563	0,312	0,231	2,440	0,015**	0,023
		CA_FI	← Nepotism	0,234	0,152	0,200	1,172	0,241	0,097
	Structural Equality			CA_CC= 0,563 x Nepotism					
	Man	CA_CC	← Nepotism	0,375	0,197	0,137	2,739	0,006**	0,019
		CA_FI	← Nepotism	0,247	0,138	0,139	1,782	0,075***	0,039
	Structural Equality			CA_CC= 0,375 x Nepotism CA_FI= 0,247 x Nepotism					
H ₃	Authoritarian	CA_CC	← Nepotism	0,138	0,110	0,187	0,736	0,462	0,049
		CA_FI	← Nepotism	0,314	0,221	0,185	1,698	0,090***	0,012
	Structural Equality			CA_FI= 0,314 x Nepotism					
	Democratic	CA_CC	← Nepotism	0,538	0,266	0,151	3,573	0,001*	0,012
		CA_FI	← Nepotism	0,158	0,108	0,115	1,367	0,172	0,071
	Structural Equality			CA_CC= 0,538 x Nepotism					
Careless	CA_CC	← Nepotism	-10,033	-0,539	39,856	-0,252	0,801	0,955	
	CA_FI	← Nepotism	-18,659	-0,977	75,593	-0,247	0,805	0,291	
H ₄	Private	CA_CC	← Nepotism	0,329	0,188	0,236	1,395	0,163	0,004
		CA_FI	← Nepotism	0,077	0,061	0,222	0,345	0,730	0,035
	Public	CA_CC	← Nepotism	0,426	0,259	0,149	2,859	0,004**	0,039
		CA_FI	← Nepotism	0,310	0,199	0,138	2,252	0,024**	0,067
	Structural Equality			CA_CC = 0,426 x Nepotism					
	Freelance	CA_CC	← Nepotism	0,392	0,130	0,492	0,795	0,426	0,007
CA_FI		← Nepotism	0,255	0,086	0,534	0,478	0,633	0,017	
Academic	CA_CC	← Nepotism	0,588	0,144	0,375	1,565	0,118	0,003	
	CA_FI	← Nepotism	0,225	0,052	0,464	0,486	0,627	0,021	
H ₅	Less	CA_CC	← Nepotism	4,256	0,817	2,618	1,626	0,104	0,478
		CA_FI	← Nepotism	4,051	0,692	2,291	1,768	0,077***	0,668
	Structural Equality			CA_CC= 4,051 x Nepotism					
	Middle	CA_CC	← Nepotism	0,293	0,147	0,179	1,641	0,101	0,010
		CA_FI	← Nepotism	0,169	0,099	0,162	1,044	0,292	0,022
	Less-Medium	CA_CC	← Nepotism	0,190	0,161	0,145	1,315	0,189	0,011
CA_FI		← Nepotism	0,103	0,103	0,125	0,821	0,412	0,026	
High	CA_CC	← Nepotism	0,423	0,209	0,892	0,474	0,635	0,025	
	CA_FI	← Nepotism	0,281	0,159	0,378	0,745	0,456	0,044	

Note: * denotes 1%, ** denotes 5% significance level, *** denotes 10% significance level.



In this context, the perception of nepotism affects both professional and family-based career anxiety for the participants who intend to continue their careers in the public sector. However the perception of nepotism does not affect professional and family-based career anxiety for the participants who intend to continue their careers in the private, freelance, and academic sectors. From this perspective, the effect of nepotism perception on career anxiety differs in terms of type according to the sector in which the respondents intend to work. In light of this information, hypothesis H_4 is partially accepted.

In hypothesis H_3 , it is seen that the perception of nepotism affects family-based professional career anxiety ($CR > \pm 1.96$, $P < 0.01$) for participants with low household income. However, it is seen that the nepotism perceptions of the participants with other household income levels do not affect either professional or family-based career anxiety. When the structural equation is examined, it is seen that the perception of nepotism affects family-based career anxiety (4,051), and the explanatory power of the equation is ($R^2 = 0,668$). In this context, the perception of nepotism affects the family-based career anxiety of participants with low household income. On the other hand, the perception of nepotism does not affect the occupational and family-based career anxiety of the participants with higher household income than those with relatively low household income. Given the previously stated knowledge, hypothesis H_3 is partially accepted.

Conclusion

While some studies address career anxiety and nepotism as separate constructs, the literature lacks research testing how demographic factors mediate the impact of perceived nepotism on career anxiety. Accordingly, this study primarily aims to explore the influence of nepotism perception on the career anxiety among senior students on the verge of entering the workforce and recent graduates. To this end, we have conducted a multiple group analysis to determine whether the participants' demographic characteristics modulate the effect of nepotism perception on career anxiety.

In the study, we first examined whether the perception of nepotism influences career anxiety. Subsequently, we assessed if the impact of nepotism perception on career anxiety varies according to certain demographic characteristics among senior university students and recent graduates. The choice of this sample was informed by the hypothesis that these individuals are likely to experience heightened levels of career anxiety, given the urgency to commence their careers amidst limited job opportunities.

The analysis revealed that the perception of nepotism significantly affects career anxiety; nepotism, referred to as the 'dark side of the career system' (Baruch & Vardi, 2015), exacerbates both professional and familial career anxieties. These findings align with previous research (Bekesiene et al., 2021; Agun et al., 2021).

In the analysis of demographic characteristics, we found that the influence of nepotism perception on career anxiety partially differed by gender. It was observed that nepotism perception only affected professional career anxiety among female participants, whereas it impacted both professional and family-based career anxiety in male participants. Considering career indecision as a significant component of career anxiety (Şeker, 2021), the lower levels of career indecision typically reported by women (Guay et al., 2003) may contribute to their reduced levels of career anxiety.

Regarding parental attitude, while the perception of nepotism increases family-based career anxiety in authoritarian families, it affects occupational career anxiety in democratic families. However, no effect was found between the perception of nepotism and career anxiety in participants raised in families with indifferent attitudes. Therefore, it was revealed that family, which impacts career development (Akbaş & Okutan, 2020; Ginevra et al., 2015; Vignoli, 2005; Xing & Rojewski, 2018), also affects career anxiety.

It is also partially acknowledged that differences exist according to the sector desired (private, public, freelance, academic). Participants aspiring to work in the public sector are affected by nepotism perception in terms of both professional and family-based career anxiety. This effect is not evident among those aiming for careers in the private and freelance sectors or academic careers. Bekesiene et al. (2021) have noted that nepotism engenders insecurity within public and private organizations. Moreover, the interview process in the public sector exacerbates career anxiety by facilitating nepotism (Yüksel & Karafil, 2022).

Finally, the influence of household income level (low, medium, or high) on the perception of nepotism and subsequent career anxiety is examined. It was observed that nepotism perception significantly impacted family-based career anxiety among participants from low-income households, while it did not affect professional or family-based career anxiety among those from higher-income households. This finding aligns with existing literature (Darwish et al., 2021; Yasin et al., 2019).

In summary, this study demonstrates that the perception of nepotism influences career anxiety and that this impact varies across different demographic characteristics. Given that nepotism is a prevailing issue, the establishment of career centers and provision of career guidance are essential to mitigate the career anxiety that stems from demographic disparities.

The collection of data through convenience sampling is the biggest limitation in the generalizability of the results. In future studies, addressing potential variables such as cultural background, educational background and geographical location that may affect the observed relationships will strengthen the validity of the study.

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