

Impact of Self-Efficacy on Negative Career Thoughts in University Graduates

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Abstract

The current study was aimed to examine self-efficacy as determinant of negative career thoughts (NCT). It was completed in two phases. The first phase comprised of tryout, which demonstrated that all the scales being used in this study entailed satisfactory indices of reliability and internal consistency. The second phase consisted of main study on a purposive sample of 256 graduate individuals. The age of the sample ranged from 24 to 37 years. Correlational analysis showed that, self-efficacy was negatively correlated with NCT and its construct scales. Linear regression analysis demonstrated self-efficacy as significant negative predictor of NCT total and its constructs. Significant gender differences were demonstrated on self-efficacy. Limitations of the study and suggestions for future empirical endeavors have been discussed.

Key words: Commitment Anxiety, Decision Making Confusion, External Conflict, Negative Career Thoughts, Self-efficacy.

1. Introduction

Most essential decisions that individuals make in life are their career decisions and choices. Career decisions are defined as individuals' choices about occupations, education, training and employment (Sampson, Reardon, Peterson, & Lenz 2004). Cognitive information processing theory (CIP; Reardon, Lenz, Sampson, & Peterson, 2000) has been applied to the career development process and provides a basis for career interventions that deal with the psychological variables associated with making effective career decisions. CIP theory suggests that effective career problem solving and decision making is based on the effective processing of information related to self-knowledge, occupational information, decision making skills, and executive processing. Self-knowledge is conceptualized as an individual's perceptions of his or her values, interests, and skills (Reardon et al., 2000; Sampson, Peterson, Lenz, & Reardon, 1992).

1.1 Negative career thoughts and Self-efficacy

Career thoughts have been defined as outcomes of an individual's thinking about assumptions, attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, feelings, plans, and strategies related to career problem solving and decision-making (Sampson, Jr. et al., 1996). CIP conceptualizes clients' career thinking as negative career thoughts that may lie in the domains of decision-making confusion, commitment anxiety, or external conflict (Reardon et al., 2000).

Negative career thoughts (NCT) based on CIP are believed to interfere with the career decision-making process. NCT, as measured by the Career Thoughts Inventory (CTI; Sampson, Peterson, Lenz, Reardon, & Saunders, 1998), have been found to be inversely related to both career decisiveness and choosing a field of study (Saunders, Peterson, Sampson, & Reardon, 2000). Negative or dysfunctional career thoughts can have a negative impact on the career decision-making process and an individual's career and vocational development.

Graduate individuals seeking for job may be particularly vulnerable to negative career thoughts (NCT) because of inadequate opportunity to make vocational decisions and to understand the impact of functional limitations on career decisions (Lusting & Strauser, 2002). Theories of self-efficacy have been applied to understand the dynamics involved in choosing a career or making decisions about career opportunities. There is evidence that personal self-efficacy beliefs play a major role in career development and pursuits (Bandura, 1997). Much of existing research has been allocated to the understanding of the straightforwardly accessible college student, and relatively less attention has been given to unemployed adults. The purpose of this study was to investigate relationship between self-efficacy and NCT among unemployed graduates. Research in the area of career counseling has found that people's thoughts and beliefs about themselves and their career options affect their ability to make decisions. Research has also demonstrated that individuals with positive thoughts relating to career decision making tend to make effective decisions, however individuals who hold negative or dysfunctional cognitions relating to career decision making tend to experience difficulty and display avoidance behaviors in the face of this decisional dilemma (Sampson et al., 2004).

A plethora of research to date have examined NCT as the outcomes of various psychological and mental health constructs, such as low self esteem, (Chartrand et al., 1994), anxiety (Skorupa & Agresti, 1998), high levels of family conflict, career indecision (Sampson et al., 1996b), and depression (e.g. Dodge, 2001; Kleiman et al., 2004). Dysfunctional career thoughts have also been found related to distorted, deceptive, and biased career beliefs that generally remain unnoticed and lead to self-defeating behaviors and experiences (Kinner & Krumboltz, 1986).

Bandura (1986) has defined self-efficacy as People's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances, which is concerned, not with the skills one has, but with judgments of what one can do, with whatever skills one possesses. One's career course, or the factors that are involved with an individual's career search, are poised of self-efficacy beliefs. Taylor and Pompa (1990) concluded that career exploration abilities were predicted by the level of general self-efficacy. Research has (e.g. Bergeron & Romano, 1994) pointed out that self-efficacy beliefs influence the choice of majors and career decisions of college students.

Practitioners and researchers in the field of counseling maintained interest in studying the predictors and impacts of NCT. Paivanday et al. (2008) investigated decision making style and cognitive thoughts patters as significant predictors of NCT. Similarly, Austin, Dahl and Wagner (2005) found emotional intelligence as significant predictor of NCT. Self-efficacy has been shown to be related to several career-related constructs, including certainty (Betz, Klein, & Taylor, 1996), fear of commitment, personality traits of conscientiousness and extraversion (Bullock-Yowell, Andrews, & Buzzetta, 2011; Hartman & Betz, 2007). Present study was aimed to study the self-efficacy as predictors of NCT among unemployed graduates. In present study self-efficacy has been taken as an independent variable which attributed to the prediction of NCT and its construct scales, i.e. decision making confusion, commitment anxiety and external conflict, among university graduates who were seeking jobs. Self-efficacy previously has been observed as a vital factor to address career decision making issues of unemployed individuals (Aviram, 2006). Presents research was aimed to meet three objectives. First, to study the relationship pattern between self-efficacy and negative career thoughts; secondly, to study self-efficacy as negative predictor of negative career thoughts and its composite constructs; finally, it was intended to examine the gender differences on self-efficacy and negative career thoughts.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

Purposive sampling technique was used to draw a sample of unemployed university graduates ($N = 256$), which comprised males ($n = 131$) and females ($n = 125$). The sample included individuals, who were looking for jobs after successful completion of their graduation (16 year of education).

Sample was approached through examination centers of the Punjab and federal public service commissions, and public libraries of Lahore, Sargodha and Islamabad. The age range for both male and female participants was between 24 to 37 years ($M = 29.12$, $SD = 3.13$).

2.2. Instruments

According to the nature of the study, following scales were believed to be suitable:

2.2.1. General Self-efficacy Scale

Self-efficacy Scale is a 10-item scale that was developed by Schwarzer and Matthias (1993). It is 4-point scale, ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 4 (exactly true). It has been used in numerous studies, where it typically yielded internal consistencies ranged from .75 to .90 (Schwarzer, 1992). Schwarzer and Jerusalem (2000) revised the current scale and this 10 item version was used in present research to measure general self-efficacy.

2.2.2. Career Thoughts Inventory (CTI)

The CTI is a 48 item questionnaire designed to assess negative career thoughts. Responses are anchored on four point rating; “strongly disagree” (SD) to “strongly agree” (SD). The CTI yields a total score which is used as a global indicator of dysfunctional career decision-making and three construct scale scores: Decision Making Confusion (DMC), Commitment Anxiety (CA), and External Conflict (EC). The DMC scale measures an inability to begin the decision-making process due to impairing emotions and/or a lack of knowledge about the process of decision-making. The CA scale measures an inability to commit to a specific career choice and the presence of generalized anxiety about the consequence of making a career decision. The EC scale represents a person's negative thinking with regard to balancing one's own perceptions against the perceptions of significant others related to making career choices.

Sampson et al. (1996) reported acceptable alpha internal consistency in a college student sample (i.e., total score = .96, DMC = .94, CA = .88, and EC = .77) and non-college student adult sample (i.e., total score = .97, DMC = .94, CA = .91, and EC = .81). Test-retest reliabilities were measured in college and high school students during a 4-week period and ranged from .74 to .82 (Sampson et al., 1996).

2.3 Procedure

The present study was executed into two phases. In first phase a tryout was carried out to ensure the psychometric soundness and suitability of scales before using them for main study. The sample of tryout was composed of 70 unemployed graduates who were seeking jobs. The tryout demonstrated that all the scales being used in this study entailed satisfactory indices of reliability and internal consistency. The second phase consisted of main study on a purposive sample of 256 unemployed graduates who were looking for jobs. The participants were individually contacted on examination centers of Punjab and federal public service commissions and public libraries. They were briefed about the rationale and objectives of the current study and be provided with the booklet containing the aforementioned scales. They were assured of the confidentiality of the information that they were going to provide as it would only be used for research purpose. Informed consent was taken through form. The instruments were accompanied by demographic data form and written as well as oral instructions on how to respond each question/item. The order in which the instruments were administered was randomly alternated to control for possible order effects.

3. Results

Inter-variable correlation, reliability, means and standard deviations for the Self-efficacy, CTI and its sub-scales ensured that the scales were culturally free instrument and appropriate for Pakistani population. Separate reliabilities were computed for each sub-scale.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations and Alpha Reliabilities of all the variables in the study (N = 256)

Variables	Means	SD	α	SE	NCT	DMC	CA	EC
SE	30.77	4.46	.74	--	-.42*	-.38*	-.40*	-.24*
NCT	107.12	20.97	.94	--	--	.73*	.92*	.93*
DMS	27.93	7.40	.84	--	--	--	.79*	.57*
CA	22.56	5.02	.83	--	--	--	--	.65*
EC	12.19	2.52	.72	--	--	--	--	--

Note. NCT = negative career thoughts; DMS = decision making confusion; CA = commitment anxiety; EC = external conflict.

* $p < .001$

Table 1 showed means, standard deviations, internal consistency index (alpha coefficient) and correlation matrix for all the scales and sub-scales. The Table indicated that all the scales and sub-scales achieved satisfactory alpha level.

Table 2

Linear Regression Analysis of Self-efficacy for Negative Career Thoughts and its Construct Scales (N = 256)

Models Predictor Variable	NCT			DMC			CA			EC		
	β	ΔR^2	F	β	ΔR^2	F	β	ΔR^2	F	β	ΔR^2	F
Self-efficacy	-.41	.17	41.16***	-.37	.14	32.53***	-.39	.15	35.23***	-.24	.06	11.68**

Note. NCT = negative career thoughts; DMS = decision making confusion; CA = commitment anxiety; EC = external conflict. $df = 1, 255$, ** $p < .001$,

*** $p < .001$

Table 2 demonstrated regression models for NCT { $F(1, 255) = 41.16$ }, DMC { $F(1, 255) = 32.53$ }, CA { $F(1, 255) = 35.23$ } and EC { $F(1, 255) = 11.68$ }.

The results showed self-efficacy as significant negative predictor of NCT ($\beta = -.41, t = 6.41, p < .001$), DMC ($\beta = -.37, t = 5.70, p < .001$), CA ($\beta = -.39, t = 6.02, p < .001$) and EC showing the beta value ($\beta = -.24, t = 3.42, p < .01$).

Table 2 also explains 17% variance in NCT, 14% variance in DMC, 15% variance in CA and 6% variance in EC that could be attributed to self-efficacy. The results also showed that self-efficacy has significantly contributed variance to the all components of negative career thoughts.

Table 3

Comparison of Males and Females on Self-efficacy, Negative Career Thoughts and its Components (N = 256)

Variables	Males (n = 131)		Females (n = 125)		t(254)	95% CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD		LL	UL	
Self-efficacy	31.37	4.35	30.13	4.52	1.98*	.04	2.47	.28
NCT	105.29	20.85	109.02	21.04	1.26	-9.57	2.10	-.17
DMC	26.13	7.12	28.76	7.64	1.58	-3.71	.45	-.36
CA	22.24	5.03	23.89	5.98	.93	-2.05	.74	-.29
EC	12.98	2.58	14.31	2.47	1.18	-1.13	.29	-.52

Note. NCT = negative career thoughts; DMS = decision making confusion; CA = commitment anxiety; EC = external conflict

* $p < .05$

Results in Table 2 demonstrated the mean gender differences and effect size on self-efficacy, negative career thoughts and construct scales. The only mean differences were found to be significant on self-efficacy $\{t(254) = 1.98, p < .05\}$. It implies that males were higher on self-efficacy, whereas non significant results were found on negative career thoughts and its components.

4. Discussion

The present study was executed in two phases. In the first phase, tryout was conducted to ensure psychometric properties of the scales used in the current study. Reliability estimation is considered as necessary step which provides the readers as well researcher an empirical index of extent to which the measurement error may be affecting the measure of variables. Greater reliability is indicator of less measurement error. Nunnally (1978) recommended the alpha value of .70 for empirical research. The internal consistencies of aforementioned scales were in the range .72 to .94 (see Table 1) that assured suitability and soundness of measurements.

Second phase comprised of the main study which was carried out to investigate the role of self-efficacy in prediction of negative career thoughts among unemployed graduates. In order to yield an insight in relationship pattern among variables Pearson correlation was computed. Findings of the present research suggested significant negative correlations of self-efficacy with NCT total score and its three composite constructs i.e., decision making confusion (DMC), commitment anxiety (CA), and external conflict (EC) (see Table 1). These findings paved solid bases to test the relational hypothesis. Career development is a process that involves the interplay of various factors including an individual's abilities, education, family, socioeconomic status, ethnic identity, culture, gender, self-efficacy, work personality, interests, and job satisfaction. The belief of self-efficacy in such circumstances plays an inevitable role to reduce NCT. The higher self-efficacy was plausibly contrary to negative thoughts of any sort; therefore current findings were quite logical.

The reasons for the finding of negative relationship between self-efficacy and NCT can also be attributed to many factors. There has been much research indicating the importance of social competence and self-efficacy to career adjustment as well (e.g. Enright, Conyers, & Szymanski 1996). Of course those, with high self-efficacy, must be having less NCT and well adjusted to their career path. Current findings are in line with Bullock-Yowell, Katz, Reardon, and Peterson (2012) who found inverse relationship between career decision-making self-efficacy and negative career thinking among college students and unemployed adults.

In order to achieve second objective NCT total, DMC, CA, EC were separately regressed on self-efficacy. Results revealed self-efficacy as the significant negative predictor of all the aforementioned variables. A reasonable explanation for these findings seem obvious that self-efficacy is concerned not only with the number of skills one have, but also with belief that one can do with what one have under a variety of circumstances. Efficacy beliefs operate as a key factor in a generative system of human competence whereas negative career thoughts are associated with confusion, anxiety and conflict etc., so these two characteristics are assumed like two extremes of continuum and there negative relationship is somewhat obvious. Sweeney and Shill (1998) investigated that career indecision has also demonstrated a significant relationship to self-efficacy beliefs.

Pinquart, Juang, and Silbereisen (2003) supports current findings who found that individuals with higher self-efficacy beliefs and academic scores were less likely to experience career indecision and were more likely to experience employment and job satisfaction. Our results can be justified because it is perceived that individuals having high self-efficacy encompass a tendency to visualize success for themselves and seek positive support and outcomes for their career ambitions. Bullock-Yowell et al. (2012) also found the same pattern of negative relationship between career decision-making self-efficacy and NCT and its sub constructs which endorsed current empirical findings. Taylor and Popma (1990) found a moderate negative relationship between self efficacy and career indecision, and identified self-efficacy as a variable that make a significant contribution to the prediction of career indecision. Betz and Voyten (1997) also established self-efficacy beliefs as the best predictor of career indecision. The last objective of the study was to study gender differences on self efficacy and NCT. Results demonstrated significant gender differences on self-efficacy, whereas NCT and its all constructs i.e. DMC, CA and EC yielded non significant gender differences. Limited employment prospect, competitive environment might exerts pressures for both genders that lead them to NCT extensively. As reported by John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development (2009) that most unemployed workers reported symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress, including difficulty sleeping, social avoidance, and impaired relationships.

There is dearth of research which investigated gender differences on NCT. Osborn, Howard, and Leierer (2007) found that neither gender nor race/ethnicity was related to dysfunctional career thoughts, which is in the same fission with current findings. Another possible explanation for present results might be that during the first decade of 21st century a trend has been observed in Pakistan that both male and female family members started contributing for most of monetary and social matters. The common roles shared by men and women determine the extent of the negative career thoughts they experience.

Self-efficacy has been seen as an important factor to address with unemployed individuals (Steinweg, 1990) and is acknowledged in research on the unemployed (e.g., Aviram, 2006). Our results showed significant mean differences on self-efficacy, which implied that males' self-efficacy beliefs were higher. It has been evidently observed that when the different manners in nurturing boys and girls are considered; it can easily be witnessed that boys can access to environments where their efficacy perception is influenced and nurtured substantially than females can. On the other hand the oral encouragement for boys can be counted as a reason in having higher efficiency perception. There is also considerable body of existing literature suggests non significant gender difference on self-efficacy. Our findings also determined contrary results from other researches (Betz, Klein, & Taylor, 1996; Betz & Voyten, 1997; Luzon, 1993), who accounted for non significant differences on gender. Anyhow our findings are in same fashion with Bozgeyikli, Eroğlu, and Hamurcu (2009) who found significant gender difference on SES and career decision-making self-efficacy among Turkish adults.

5. Conclusions and Implications

In conclusion, the findings elucidated that the self-efficacy was significant negative predictor of negative career thought, moreover gender difference were found to be significant on self-efficacy. Current investigation provides groundwork for possible implication in various settings of career development. Studies on the mainstream have shown that self-efficacy prospects significantly influence career choices, performance, persistence, and employment outcome (Asmundsdottir, 2004; Panagos & Dubois, 1999). Because valuable career problem solving and decision-making must based on a client's ability to develop and use effective information processing cleverness, it is important for practitioners and researchers to have a conceptual outline for implementation of effective interventions that reduce negative career thoughts.

5.1. Limitations and Recommendations

As with any study, there are certain limitations. Inferences from this study are restricted to the small sample size; self-repot measures and response biases; therefore these should be seen with caution. Further understanding of the influence of pertinent demographic characteristics and career thoughts of unemployed individuals, can be accomplished with additional research.

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