

The Examination of Peer Pressure Management and Career Anxiety Problems Among Sports Science Faculty Students

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ABSTRACT

Study aim(s): This study aimed to investigate the relationship between Sports Science Faculty students' perceptions of peer pressure and their levels of career anxiety. Additionally, the study sought to determine whether peer pressure and career anxiety differ based on demographic variables such as gender, grade level, and academic department. Although these relational dynamics and demographic comparisons are not explicitly reflected in the study title, they are fully addressed and clarified within this section.

Methods: A correlational survey model was used in this study. The study group consisted of 250 university students enrolled in various departments within the Faculty of Sports Sciences, including Sports Management, Physical Education Teaching, Coaching, and Recreation. Data were collected using the Peer Pressure Scale and the Career Anxiety Scale. Parametric tests were applied to analyze the data after confirming that the necessary assumptions were met. The methodology framework was designed to examine both the relationships between peer pressure and career anxiety and the differences in these variables across demographic subgroups.

Results: Students reported high levels of peer pressure ($\bar{x} = 3.87$) and moderate levels of career anxiety ($\bar{x} = 3.26$). Female students perceived higher peer pressure than male students, whereas male students exhibited higher levels of career anxiety. Significant differences were observed according to grade level: first-year students reported lower peer pressure but higher career anxiety. No significant differences were found according to department. Correlation analysis revealed a positive and significant relationship between peer pressure and career anxiety. Regression analysis indicated that peer pressure explained 45% of career anxiety.

Conclusion: The findings indicate that peer pressure is a significant predictor of career anxiety among university students. Consequently, social environment and peer influences should be carefully considered in career planning and counselling practices. These results align with current literature emphasizing the critical role of social dynamics in shaping students' career-related psychological outcomes.

Keywords: Peer Pressure, Career Anxiety, Bullying, University Students

INTRODUCTION

Individuals undergo continuous development throughout their lives. Within these developmental processes, the social dimension emerges as a fundamental component. Consequently, alongside genetic influences, the social environment plays a decisive role in shaping an individual's character. While the structural nature of the social environments in which individuals are born and raised can foster positive ethical development, in some cases, the opposite effect may occur. As humans are born as social and emotional beings, their development begins within the family, the smallest social unit, and continues through participation in various social groups [14, 16, 54]. In this context, during the period following childhood, individuals learn to conform to social norms and identify the values of the groups to which they belong [5]. This period, characterized by intense emotional, social, cognitive and physical development, often involves stress and turmoil. As with all developmental processes, individual differences become particularly pronounced during adolescence. The ability to navigate adolescence more calmly and cope with the challenges of this period depends on many factors [1]. Among the most important of these are peer relationships. Adolescence is a transitional period in which individuals are neither children nor adults. Consequently, young people remain dependent on others throughout much of this stage. Toward the end of adolescence, peers encountered in various social contexts assume a more central role in their lives [34]. Therefore, as adolescents become part of new social environments, they begin to spend more time with their peers and spend less time with their family [6, 11, 15, 22]. Various social requirements that emerge within the peer group, such as belonging and attachment, can lead individuals to come under the influence of their peers [2]. In this context, adolescents adopt new and different behavior patterns under the influence of their

friends, making personal concessions when necessary to remain part of their peer groups [26]. Peer pressure emerges from both the attitudes and behaviors exhibited by young people and the behaviors they adopt in response [3]. Thus, peer pressure emerges as adolescents come under the influence of their peer groups. It can be understood as the power exerted by groups, formed when young people or children come together, to influence individual behavior. Specifically, peer pressure can be defined as the persistent urging and encouragement of individuals to engage in certain behaviors during ongoing activities within peer groups [41]. In schools, where adolescents' emotional and social development may be negatively affected, peer pressure can be defined as bullying [7]. Similarly, in adult work environments, it can appear as harassment (mobbing) [31]. In a study conducted by [46], gender-based analysis revealed that 15% of boys and 7% of girls engaged in bullying behaviors. Thus, individuals who exhibit bullying behavior during school age tend to continue such behavior into adolescence, whereas those who are not bullies in childhood generally do not become bullies later, though they may be exposed to bullying. During this period, as feelings of friendship gain prominence, peer group pressure can become equal to or even greater than the influence of the family over time [5]. While peer pressure can have negative effects, it may also produce positive outcomes. In a study conducted by Rubin and Thompson, individuals with positive peer relationships were found to adapt by displaying certain positive behaviors. The study also showed that students who maintain strong and effective communication with their classmates experience lower levels of depression and have higher school attachment and attendance rates [39]. Therefore, peer pressure can generally be explained as a situation in which an individual's own ideas and desires carry little weight within the group, while the influence of peers' ideas and desires is effective [10]. As a result of the negative effects of peer pressure, individuals may also develop

career-related anxiety and stress. Therefore, critical processes arise in the pursuit and achievement of life goals. Both high school and university years emerge as important periods in which career-oriented achievements are pursued. During these years, students often face anxieties related to their future professional careers, academic success, and financial resources [53]. Career anxiety is a central source of stress experienced by university students [25]. Anxiety is defined as a state of worry and tension about future uncertainties [24]. It emerges from childhood and encompasses individuals' relationships with peers, parents and teachers. Anxiety can develop as a result of interactions with others who exhibit anxious behaviors [20]. Individuals may not feel anxious when they feel safe in a particular environment. However, anxiety levels can increase if someone else in the same environment perceives it as threatening [13]. Consequently, various factors influence an individual's anxiety levels. Among these, peer pressure, age, gender, educational status, and the number of siblings have been shown to significantly impact anxiety in young people [35]. Anxiety is a primary factor that affects success and productivity in professional life. In this context, many factors influence career-related anxiety [27]. Nowadays, individuals shape their professional careers and related aspirations by making informed choices for their future and striving to achieve predetermined goals [42]. Individuals who have passed through adolescence always feel the need to play an active role in their lives. Consequently, many people try to satisfy this need by pursuing a career [52]. A career holds an important place as an occupation that individuals aspire to and work for throughout their lives [45]. Career has been defined as the set of challenges that must be overcome to obtain a desired profession and the path that must be followed to remain in that profession [44]. Nowadays, it has become one of the most significant decision-making processes, especially as young people seek to shape and sustain their lives during their university years.

The job preferences, friendships, future plans, and concerns about not finding employment among young people approaching their final years of university are some of the key factors that trigger career anxiety [49]. A study conducted on university students indicates that symptoms of anxiety and depression in young people are also linked with peer bullying experienced during childhood [29]. As a result of the negative effects and pressures of peers, peer bullying may also be associated with older adolescents exhibiting more depressive and withdrawn behaviors. Thus, it has been found that as the level of bullying experienced by older adolescents increases, their anxiety and depression rise proportionally [36]. Peer pressure has been shown to significantly influence students' academic performance. Therefore, higher levels of peer pressure are associated with declines in academic outcomes [17]. Peer relationships play a decisive role in individuals' psychosocial adjustment during adolescence and young adulthood. Numerous studies in the literature examine the relationships between peer pressure, peer bullying, peer interactions, and emotional challenges such as depression, anxiety, and their impact on academic achievement [29, 36, 39, 46]. However, research examining the specific relationship between peer pressure and career anxiety among university students is limited, as these two variables are often studied separately. During the transition to adulthood, the influence of peer groups increases while career-related uncertainties and more complex decision-making processes. Therefore, examining the impact of peer pressure on career anxiety addresses an important gap in both developmental psychology and the field of guidance and psychological counseling. This study aims to fill this gap by comprehensively examining the relationship between peer pressure and career anxiety in a sample of university students.

METHODS

This study aimed to examine the effect of peer pressure perceptions on career anxiety among students of the Faculty of Sports Sciences, considering various variables. Adopting a descriptive approach, this study utilized a correlational survey model, which aims to provide insights into potential cause-and-effect relationships by examining the relationships between two or more variables [12].

Research design

The study followed a structured design in which participants completed two validated instruments: the Peer Pressure Scale and the Career Anxiety Scale. The scales were administered under standardized conditions to ensure reliability. As this was an observational study, no experimental manipulation, control group, or intervention protocol was applied. Key methodological details were included to ensure that the research process is clearly understandable and replicated, without overloading the reader with unnecessary procedural descriptions.

Study sample

The study sample consisted of 250 volunteer students enrolled in the Faculty of Sport Sciences at a public university offering bachelor's degree programs in sports education. Among the participants, 125 (50%) were female and 125 (50%) were male. In terms of class level, 61 students (24%) were first-year, 61 (24%) second-year, 67 (26%) were third year, and 61 (24%) were fourth-year students. A power analysis using the Raosoft Sample Size Calculator confirmed the adequacy of the sample size. With a 95% confidence level, a 5% margin of error, and a 50% response distribution, the minimum required sample size was calculated as 152. With 250 participants, the actual sample exceeded this requirement, indicating that it was statistically sufficient. All participants took part in the study voluntarily. They were informed

about the purpose, scope, and procedures of the research and provided written informed consent form prior to participation. Participant selection was based on inclusion criteria, including being an active undergraduate student in the Faculty of Sport Sciences and willingness to participate. There were no exclusion criteria beyond the incomplete or improper of the measurement tools. As this study did not involve experimental manipulation, randomization or blinding procedures were not applicable. The research was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki.

Data collection tools

A demographic information form, the Peer Pressure Scale, and the Career Anxiety Scale were used as data collection tools in the study. Data were obtained voluntarily from participants through the administration of these scales.

Peer Pressure Scale

The Peer Pressure Scale, developed by Esen [17], consists of 34 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Participants indicate the frequency with which each statement reflects their experience using the following scale: 5 = Always, 4 = Often, 3 = Sometimes, 2 = Occasionally, and 1 = Never. Scores on the scale range from 34 to 180, with higher scores indicating greater exposure to peer pressure. The reliability of the PPS was evaluated using internal consistency coefficients, item-total correlations, and the test-retest method. For the full 34-item scale (n=208), the Cronbach's Alpha was determined to be .90. Among the subscales, the Cronbach's alpha for the 19-item Direct Peer Pressure section was .89, and for the 15-item Indirect Peer Pressure section, it was .82. In the present study, the internal consistency of the PPS was re-evaluated using data from the sample (N = 250). The Cronbach's alpha for the total scale in this study was .987, indicating an exceptionally high level of internal consistency.

Similarly, the reliability of the Career Anxiety Scale was examined, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of .961 for the total scale. These findings demonstrate that both measurement tools used in the study possess excellent internal reliability within the current sample.

Career Anxiety Scale

The Career Anxiety Scale, developed by Gündüz and Yılmaz [21], consists of 15 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The reliability of the measurement tool was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency coefficient, based on data obtained from the third study group. The analysis revealed that the reliability coefficient for the sub-dimension addressing anxieties about career choice within the career development process was .797, while the sub-dimension related to anxieties about family influence had a reliability coefficient of .742. In general, reliability coefficients of .70 or higher indicate that the scores obtained from the measurement tool are considered reliable [8]. In this context, it can be stated that the developed Career Anxiety Scale demonstrates sufficient reliability. In the present study, the reliability of the CAS was re-evaluated using data obtained from the current sample (N = 250). The

Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the total scale in the current study was .961, indicating excellent internal consistency. Presenting both sets of reliability coefficients clarifies that the values reported by Gündüz and Yılmaz [21] belong to the original scale development, whereas the .961 coefficient represents the reliability obtained from the present sample.

Data analysis

In this study, conducted during the autumn and spring semesters of the 2024-2025 academic year, data were collected from volunteers enrolled in the Faculty of Sports Sciences. IBM SPSS Statistics 24 software was used for data analysis. Descriptive statistical analyses were applied to the demographic variables, the Peer Pressure Scale, and the Career Anxiety Scale. The Shapiro-Wilk normality test showed that the skewness and kurtosis values were within the +1.5-1.5 range, indicating that the data were normally distributed [48]. Since normality was confirmed, independent samples T-tests, One-Way ANOVA, Pearson Correlation, and Regression Analyses were performed.

FINDINGS

Table 1. Mean Scores of Participants on the Peer Pressure and Career Anxiety Scale

| Scale | N | Min | Max | $\bar{X} \pm SD$ | Skewness | Kurtosis | Cronbach α (Σ) |
|----------------------|-----|------|------|------------------|----------|----------|--------------------------------|
| Peer Pressure Scale | 250 | 1,50 | 5,00 | 3,87 \pm 1,09 | -,784 | -,649 | ,987 |
| Career Anxiety Scale | 250 | 1,00 | 4,93 | 3,26 \pm 1,01 | -,569 | -,914 | ,961 |

Scales: Name of the measurement scale; N: Number of participants; Min: Minimum score; Max: Maximum score; \bar{x} : Mean score (Average); S: Standard deviation; Skewness: Skewness of the distribution; Kurtosis: Kurtosis of the distribution; Cronbach α (Σ): Internal consistency (reliability) coefficient of the scale

The participants' mean total score on the Peer Pressure Scale was determined as (\bar{x} =3.87), while the mean total

score obtained on the Career Anxiety Scale was (\bar{x} =3.26)

Table 2. T-test results for participants' mean scores on the Peer Pressure and Career Anxiety Scales by gender

| Scale | Gender | N | $\bar{X} \pm SD$ | t | p |
|----------------------|--------|-----|------------------|--------|------|
| Peer Pressure Scale | Male | 125 | 3,54 \pm ,90 | -4,981 | ,008 |
| | Female | 125 | 4,20 \pm 1,17 | | |
| Career Anxiety Scale | Male | 125 | 3,48 \pm ,90 | 3,507 | ,000 |
| | Female | 125 | 3,04 \pm 1,06 | | |

Gender: Participant gender; N: Number of participants; \bar{x} : Mean score (Average); S / SD: Standard deviation; t: t-test value; p: Significance level ($p < 0.05$)

When examining the mean scores on the Peer Pressure and Career Anxiety Scales by gender, a significant difference was observed: females scored higher on the Peer Pressure Scale, whereas males scored higher on the Career Anxiety Scale ($p < 0.05$).

Table 3. Comparison of participants' Peer Pressure and Career Anxiety Scale scores according to department variable (One-way ANOVA)

| Scale | Department | N | $\bar{X} \pm SD$ | VK | KT | Sd | KO | f | p |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|----|------------------|------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|----------------|-------|------|
| Peer Pressure Scale | Sports Management | 86 | 3,85 \pm 1,25 | Within Groups Between Groups Total | 3,937 296,3 300,2 | 3 246 249 | 1,312 1,205 | 1,090 | ,354 |
| | Physical Education Teaching | 78 | 4,03 \pm 1,14 | | | | | | |
| | Coaching Education | 76 | 3,71 \pm ,84 | | | | | | |
| | Recreation | 10 | 3,96 \pm ,98 | | | | | | |
| Career Anxiety Scale | Sports Management | 86 | 3,28 \pm 1,05 | Within Groups Between Groups Total | 6,192 248,6 254,8 | 3 246 249 | 2,064 1,011 | 2,042 | ,109 |
| | Physical Education Teaching | 78 | 1,00 | | | | | | |
| | Coaching Education | 76 | 3,42 \pm ,95 | | | | | | |
| | Recreation | 10 | ,95 | | | | | | |

N: Number of participants; \bar{x} : Mean score (Average); S / SD: Standard deviation; VK: Minimum value (Min); KT: Maximum value (Max); KO: Post hoc comparison results; F: F-value used in ANOVA to determine whether there are significant differences between group means; p: Significance level ($p < 0.05$.)

In the comparative analyses of participants' Peer Pressure and Career Anxiety scores according to the department variable, no statistically significant differences were found ($p > 0.05$).

Table 4. Comparison of Participants' Peer Pressure and Career Anxiety Scales According to Grade Variable (One-way ANOVA)

| Scale | Grade | N | $\bar{X} \pm SD$ | Sd | VK | KT | Sd | KO | f | p |
|----------------------|----------|----|------------------|------|------------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|----------------|--------|------|
| Peer Pressure Scale | 1.Grade | 61 | 2,82 | 1,26 | Within Groups Between Groups Total | 93,5 206,7 300,2 | 3 246 249 | 31,172 ,840 | 37,093 | ,000 |
| | 2.Grade | 61 | 4,39 | ,69 | | | | | | |
| | 3. Grade | 67 | 4,21 | ,74 | | | | | | |
| | 4.Grade | 61 | 4,01 | ,86 | | | | | | |
| Career Anxiety Scale | 1.Grade | 61 | 3,84 | ,79 | Within Groups Between Groups Total | 30,1 224,7 254,8 | 3 246 249 | 10,046 ,913 | 10,998 | ,000 |
| | 2.Grade | 61 | 3,01 | ,96 | | | | | | |
| | 3. Grade | 67 | 2,96 | ,95 | | | | | | |
| | 4.Grade | 61 | 3,24 | 1,08 | | | | | | |

N: Number of participants; \bar{x} : Mean score (Average); *S / SD*: Standard deviation; *VK*: Minimum value (Min); *KT*: Maximum value (Max); *KO*: Post hoc comparison results; *f*: F-value used in ANOVA to determine whether there are significant differences between group means; *p*: Significance level ($p < 0.05$.)

A statistically significant difference was found in the comparative analysis of participants' Peer Pressure and Career Anxiety scores regarding grade variable ($p < 0.05$).

Table 5. Post-Hoc Test Results for Participants' Peer Pressure and Career Anxiety by Grade Variable

| Scale | Grade | N | $\bar{X} \pm SD$ | SD | F | P | Difference |
|----------------------|----------|----|------------------|------|--------|------|-------------|
| Peer Pressure Scale | 1. Grade | 61 | 2.82 | 1.26 | 37,093 | .000 | 1 < 2, 3, 4 |
| | 2. Grade | 61 | 4.39 | .69 | | | |
| | 3. Grade | 67 | 4.21 | .74 | | | |
| | 4. Grade | 61 | 4.01 | .86 | | | |
| Career Anxiety Scale | 1. Grade | 61 | 3.84 | .79 | 10,998 | .000 | 1 > 2, 3, |
| | 2. Grade | 61 | 3.01 | .96 | | | |
| | 3. Grade | 67 | 2.96 | .95 | | | |
| | 4. Grade | 61 | 3.24 | 1.08 | | | |

N: Number of participants; \bar{x} : Mean score (Average); *SD*: Standard deviation; *F*: F-value used in ANOVA to determine whether there are significant differences between group means; *p*: Significance level ($p < 0.05$.); *Difference*: Post hoc comparison results

Participants' peer pressure scores differed significantly by grade level. First-year students reported significantly lower perceptions compared to second-, third-, and fourth-year students. Career anxiety scores also varied across grade levels, with first-year students reporting higher career anxiety than second and third-year students. However, no significant difference was found between first- and fourth-year students.

Table 6. Pearson Correlation between participants' Peer Pressure and Career Anxiety scale scores

| Scale | Sig | Peer Pressure Scale | Career Anxiety Scale |
|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Peer Pressure Scale | Pearson Correlation | | .466** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 |
| Career Anxiety Scale | Pearson Correlation | .466** | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |

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

A moderate positive, and statistically significant correlation (.466**) was found between the Peer Pressure Scale and the Career Anxiety Scale ($p < 0.01$).

Table 7. Regression Analysis Results: Effect of Peer Pressure on Career Anxiety

| Scale | Variables | Standardize β | Standard Error | Critical Ratio | p | R ² |
|---------------|----------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------|------|----------------|
| Peer Pressure | Career Anxiety | .46 | .20 | 4.92 | .000 | .45 |

Standardized β : Standardized regression coefficient; Standard Error: Standard error of the regression coefficient; Critical Ratio: Test statistic for the coefficient; p: Significance level ($p < 0.05$.); R²: Coefficient of determination

A statistically significant relationship was found between peer pressure and career anxiety ($\beta = .46$, $p < .05$). Examining the R² value presented in the

table, it can be stated that peer pressure accounts for 45% of the variance in career anxiety.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationship between students' perceptions of peer pressure and their levels of career at the Faculty of Sport Sciences, considering various demographic variables, including gender, grade, and department. The results indicated that students' perceptions of peer pressure were high ($\bar{x} = 3.87$), while their career anxiety was moderate ($\bar{x} = 3.26$), suggesting that young individuals are vulnerable to social influence and experience stress related to uncertainty about their future. Ryan and Deci [40] argued that the need for social belonging increases during adolescence and early adulthood, and that peers play a significant role in shaping individual behavior. Similarly, Clasen and Brown [10] stated that peer pressure can influence decision-making processes, leading young people to compromise personal values in order to gain approval from their peer group. Likewise, Savickas [42] emphasized that career development is closely linked to psychological vulnerability during adolescence and young adulthood. High levels of peer pressure indicate a tendency to conform to groups norms driven by the fear of social exclusion. Clasen and Brown [10] defined peer pressure as the tendency to compromise personal values in order to conform to group norms, noting its particularly strong influence on university students. Sports Sciences students, who are frequently exposed to environments characterized by intense physical competition, high performance expectations, and group affiliations, may experience an exacerbation of

peer pressure [50]. Gender analyses revealed that female students experienced higher levels of peer pressure, aligning with previous studies suggesting that women may be more emotionally sensitive and have a stronger need for social acceptance [33, 38, 39, 43] also indicated that female students place greater importance on peer approval and are more sensitive to social exclusion. Conversely, male students demonstrated higher levels of career anxiety, possibly due to societal expectations related to economic responsibility, professional success, and future planning [53]. However, some studies have reported no gender differences in peer pressure [41]. The observed gender differences in this study may reflect the competitive and community-oriented social environment within sports faculties. Analyses by grade-level indicated that first-year students experienced lower peer pressure but higher career anxiety, while upper-year students showed the opposite pattern. Kim [25] emphasized that incoming university students experience high anxiety due to academic and career uncertainty. The lower peer pressure observed among first-year students may result from their limited integration into campus social structures, whereas the higher peer pressure reported by third- and fourth-year students likely stems from competition for social status, post-graduation expectations, and adaptation to professional environments [51]. Career anxiety decreased in upper-year students as they clarified goals and developed professional identity [42]. No significant differences were found according to department, which may be

explained by the similarity in social environments, professional uncertainties, and future planning processes across the Sports Management, Physical Education Teaching, Coaching, and Recreation departments [18, 55]. Common factors such as career uncertainty, limited job opportunities, and competition were consistent across all departments [9]. Correlation analysis revealed a positive and significant relationship between peer pressure and career anxiety ($r = .466$, $p < .01$), indicating that higher levels of social pressure are associated with increased anxiety about the future. Lee [29] reported that adolescents exposed to peer bullying and social pressure show higher levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms later in life. According to Social Cognitive Theory [4], perceived environmental pressure and self-efficacy influence emotions and behavior regarding career decisions. Peer pressure, combined with the need for social acceptance, fear of

exclusion, and desire to conform to group norms, appears to trigger career anxiety. These results highlight that peer pressure is not merely a social phenomenon but also has psychological and behavioral consequences for career development. Social pressure, self-confidence, and coping skills influence career decision making [19, 23]. Students who manage peer pressure effectively are more likely to make sound career decisions and develop realistic plans for the future [47, 30]. However, the study sample consists solely of students from the Faculty of Sport Sciences, which limits the generalizability of the findings to students in other disciplines. Although participants were drawn from various regions of Turkey, the use of convenience sampling method restricts the representativeness of the study and reduces sample diversity.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study suggest that peer pressure significantly influences career anxiety among Sports Sciences students. Female students experience higher levels of peer pressure, whereas male students are more susceptible to career anxiety, and grade level has a significant impact on both variables. No differences were observed across departments. Peer pressure was positively associated with career anxiety,

explaining a substantial proportion of students' anxiety regarding future career planning. These results underscore the importance of considering social environment and peer influences in career counselling and educational planning. Universities and educators should implement guidance and support systems to help students manage peer pressure, strengthen coping strategies, and develop realistic career plans.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest concerning this study.

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