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The Influence the Middle-Schoolers' Career Path Anxiety has on their Psychological Well-Being: Focusing on the ModeratingEwffect of Ego-Resilience

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Abstract

Background/Objectives: This research explores the influence middle-school students' anxiety about their career path has on their psychological well-being, and proves the moderating effect of ego-resilience. Methods/Statistical Analysis: As supporting data, Y Office of Education's 2014 Middle School Student Mental Health Survey on 2,951 third-year middle school students living in region Y was used. Multiple regression analysis including interactive term was performed to explore the moderating effect of ego-resilience in the relationship between students' career path anxiety and their psychological well-being. Findings: Major findings from the research showed lower probability of psychological well-being as middle school students experience higher anxiety about their career path. Also, ego-resilience was found to have moderating effect on the relationship between students' career path anxiety and their psychological well-being. Based on these research outcomes, integrating intervention and practical strategies are suggested to control career path related anxieties adolescents experience and ultimately to promote their psychological well-being. Ego-resilience alleviates problematic behaviors that result from stress, and improves the ability to active problem-solving. Educational and various supports are required to strengthen ego-resilience. Interpersonal relationship building skills can be improved through different hands-on activities and group activities, as individuals interact with persons from different environments. Improvements/Applications: The school curriculum should include hands-on activities such as psychological experiments which are geared toward intensifying ego-resilience to mitigate the anxiety adolescents have about their career path.

Keywords: Career Path Anxiety, Stress, Ego-Resilience, Middle School Students, Psychological Well-Being

1. Introduction

Career is crucial in directing the course and the quality of one's life. Rather than its focus at a certain point in life, concerns and decisions on career path are made throughout the life-long process¹. Although adolescence is an important phase in which their future career path could be shaped, students are not properly aided in reaching those decisions. In our country, students tend to build their academic careers solely based on their grades, without considering their potentials and abilities. As the society promotes educational background and academic

achievement to be of the utmost values, students feel dissatisfied being immersed in the studies that only focus on college entrance exams to get into prestigious universities. Therefore, students in South Korea are deprived of their time to explore and examine their talents. Especially, South Korea's zeal for education is among the top in the world; the country was ranked the highest in the proportional expense spent on education, and students study an average of 131,400 hours during their fifteen-years of school life. This is due to the reality that the outcome of the college entrance exams decides their fate in life. In this kind of educational environment, students in South

Korea are going through extreme pressure and stress. According to the 2012 OECD's Programs for International Student Assessment (PISA), among the OECD countries, Korea had the lowest percentage of students who reported feeling happy. Students' academic drive, self-efficacy, and self-beliefs levels were all rated below the average of OECD countries². Statistics on the country's youth shows 49.3% of female students experience stress and 37.1% go through depressions. 10 out of 7 female students (69.6%) reported that they were stressed about school life. 13.1% of male students and 20.4% of female students were found to have had suicidal thoughts³. These statistics prove that Korea's students are experiencing tremendous stress at home and at school, and that their mental health is at a critical state. As a result, Korea ranks the first among the OECD countries in adolescent suicide rate. Excessive anxiety in adolescence can cause problematic behaviors, ultimately hindering student's happiness in life. As students experience expansion of their sphere of life from family to school, from parents to teacher and friends during their adolescence, they also experience increase in stress level⁴. During the early adolescent period of middle school years, students are required to have additional and higher academic achievements than the achievements of their elementary school years. Students are also especially exposed to psychological pressure of college entrance examinations as they enter the middle school. The main cause of stress for students derives from school life, and academic issues tend to contribute as major factors. Students confront academic problems on the onset of their entrance to middle school, and anxiety from college entrance results in physical anxiety symptoms such as mental health problems, weariness, and chronic headaches⁵. As a middle schooler proceeds to upper grades, the anxiety about one's academic career may worsen and cause mental and psychological disabilities. Therefore, when proper response to the anxiety and stress middle school students is used in their academic career, psychological well-being is ultimately promoted⁶. Psychological well-being can be described as a healthy and happy state of mind, happiness or satisfaction an individual experiences in life⁷. Anxiety about academic career can cause mental problems and issues; however, psychological well-being reduces the effect of negative experience and helps promote positive development. Therefore, researching those factors is required, to mitigate the negative effects of academic career related anxiety which weakens the psychological well-being8. As

a result, methods should be sought to lower the anxiety level and boost psychological well-being. Ego-resilience works as a mitigating element, helping an individual to confront problematic circumstances with flexibility9. Egoresilience plays a significant role in restoring the mental health or psychological well-being which otherwise could be at risk as a result of anxiety or stress¹⁰. It aids in bringing one to its normal state in the midst of hardships, by equipping one with the increased ability to adapt and solve problems. Therefore, high ego-resilience promotes psychological well-being. This shows that ego-resilience does not eradicate or change the academic career related anxiety, but enables one to prevent and overcome it. Deriving from a middle schooler's anxiety about career path, ego-resilience plays a crucial factor affecting one's psychological well-being, and a close relationship is seen between anxiety and ego-resilience¹¹. However, researches examining the correlation among career path related anxiety, ego-resilience, and psychological well-being are inadequate. This research paper attempts to derive an intervention strategy, correlating the anxiety adolescents have regarding their career path with psychological wellbeing and ego-resilience.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Research Target and Collecting Survey

This research was done with the participation of 3,200 third-year students from 14 different middle schools in city Y. The total amount of the survey received was 3,130, and 179 papers were not trustworthy and thus excluded, making only 2,951 papers valid to be used in this research.

2.2 Research Methods

In the research, 12 edited and improved Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale to use as a dependent variable. For independent variable which is the anxiety from career path, a scale created and used by13 was improvised to fit in this research. For moderate variable, which is the ego-resilience scale, 14 improvised and improved the scale created by Block and Block. In the research, social demographical characteristics such as gender, education level, economic level were used as controlled variables.

2.3 Date Analysis

The following analysis method was carried out to analyze the impact the career path anxiety has on students' psychological well-being and moderating effect of ego resilience. First, the subject's general characteristics and core variables were examined by using frequency analysis and descriptive statistics analysis. Second, the relationship between psychological well-being of an adolescent and the core variables was examined by through correlation analysis. Lastly, multiple regression analysis including interactive term was performed to explore the moderating effect of ego-resilience in the relationship between students' career path anxiety and their psychological well-being.

3. Results

3.1 Characteristics of the Subjects

Percentage wise, male students took up 50.2% (1481 students) and female students filled up to 49.8% (1470 students). Majority of the respondents were living with their biological parents (83.9%), and the remaining 16.1% were living with others rather than their birth parents. 70.3% of the respondents reported their family's economic status to be average while 172 respondents were noted as having financial difficulties. In regards to the academic status, 1,245 (42.2%) respondents were claimed to be above average. However, 33.2% (979) of the respondents reported their academic status as bad, showing that they were not satisfied with their academic records.(Table 1)

Table 1. Characteristics of the Subjects

variables	category	number	percentage		
gender	male	1481	50.2		
	female	1470	49.8		
family form	prenatal parents	2477	83.9		
	step parents	474	16.1		
economic	very bad	33	1.1		
status	bad	139	4.7		
	average	2074	70.3		
	good	552	18.7		
	very good	153	5.2		
academic	very bad	214	7.3		
status	bad	765	25.9		
	average	1245	42.2		
	good	559	19.3		
	very good	158	5.4		

3.2 Characteristics of Major Variables

In the research, the mean of dependent variable which is the psychological well-being is 3.374(SD=.599), the mean of moderating variable ego-resilience displayed above average score, while the mean of independent variable career path related anxiety resulted in 2.569(SD=.661) which is slightly less than the expected value.(Table 2)

Table 2. Characteristics of Major Variables

category	variables	number	Min.	Max.	Mean	S.D.
dependent variable	psycho- logical well-being	2951	1.07	5.00	3.374	.599
moderating variable	ego-resil- ience	2951	1.00	5.00	3.440	.605
independent variable	path anx-	2951	1.00	4.84	2.569	.661
	iety					

3.3 Characteristics Correlation among Major Variables

The result of the independent variable correlation is shown in Table 3. The maximum value of the correlation of core variables is .641; in other words, multicollinearity issue was not found. To strictly verify the multicollinearity issue, the sizes of the tolerance limit and the variance inflation factor were considered and their maximum value of correlation is .641, with all the tolerance greater than .01 and none of the variance inflation factors was not close to 10. The result was less likely to have a multicollinearity issue.

Table 3. Correlation among Major Variables

resilience	well-being
**	
410**	471**
1	.641**
.641**	1
	1

^{**}p<.01

3.4 The Moderating effect on the Relationship of Career Stress and Psychological Well-Being

To prove the moderating effect of ego-resilience on how the middle school students' career path anxiety influences their psychological well-being, study result was derived from calculating multiple linear regressions. Generally, when verifying moderating effect of interactive term, control variable, prediction factor, and moderator variable are applied consecutively and then correlation is added to draw hierarchical regression analysis. The differentiating factor in general hierarchical regression analysis would be analyzing the moderating effect based on varying

F values that fluctuate as control variables are applied and on the significance of R² variance. If the R² change amount is significant in the third stage where correlation factor was applied to a model, then it proves that there is a moderating effect¹⁵. In order to verify the regulation effect of ego resilience on the correlation between the career path anxiety and psychology well-being, hierarchical regression analysis was performed in three different levels. Control variable and dependent variable were applied in the first stage analysis, while in second stage, dependent variable and the moderating variable were applied as the control variables were controlled. Finally, in the third stage analysis, correlation factor was added to the second stage environment. (Table 4)

In model 1, the coefficient of determination between adolescents' career anxiety/ control variables and psychological well-being is 24.4%, proving to be statistically significant. Adolescents' career path anxiety(β =-.443, p<.001) was found to have statistically significant impact on their psychological well-being. Among the control variables, economic status (β =.117, p<.001) and academic status (β =.072, p<.001) were proven as significant factors.

In model 2, moderating variable ego-resilience

 $(\beta$ =.660, p<.001) and independent variable career path anxiety(β =-.202, p<.001) were statistically significant, with 58.4% as the coefficient of determination. Consequently, psychological well-being is promoted as the career path anxiety gets lower and ego-resilience gets higher. Among the control variables, economic status and academic status were found to have significance.

In the last model, which applied the interaction between independent variable career path anxiety and moderating variable ego-resilience as a factor, the coefficient of determination for psychological well-being came out to be 58.8%. This model explains that the moderating variable ego-resilience has significant effect on adolescents' career path anxiety and their psychological well-being. Observing the statistical significance of the correlation between independent variable career path anxiety and moderating variable ego-resilience, ego-resilience was prove to have significant reciprocal effect to influence the overall psychological well-being.

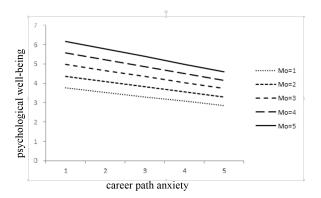
From analyzing the graph of ego-resilience moderating effect on the impact career anxiety has on the psychological well-being, students with high ego-resilience had higher psychological well-being score compared to those of the students with low ego-resilience, and rated strong

Table 4. The moderating effect on the relationship between career path anxiety and psychological well-being

classification		model 1			model 2			model 3		
		В	β	t	В	β	t	В	β	t
	constant term	2.962		59.370***	3.226		77.811***	3.224		77.616***
control variable	gender	009	007	451	.022	.018	1.545	.21	.018	1.492
	(0=male, 1=female)									
	family form	016	010	574	.010	.006	.489	.010	.006	.499
	(0= prenatal parents, 1=step									
	parents)									
	economic status	.073	.117	6.984***	.021	.034	2.706**	.021	.033	2.627**
	academic status	.045	.072	4.278***	018	029	-2.270*	018	029	-2.276**
independent	career path anxiety	401	443	-27.003***	183	202	-15.437***	181	199	-15.173***
variable										
moderating	ego-resilience				.654	.660	49.110^{***}	.650	.656	48.619***
variable										
interaction	career path anxiety							043	033	-2.696**
section	ego-resilience									
	\mathbb{R}^2	.245		.585		.586				
	Adj. R ²	.244		.584		.585				
	F	190.912***		691.286***		597.832***				
	R ² Change	.245		.340		.001				
	F Change	190.912***		2411.761***		7.271**				

^{*}p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

in psychological well-being despite the high career path anxiety. In contrast, those with low ego-resilience had the lowest psychological well-being with similarly high career path anxiety. Figure 1 also supports same conclusion as it shows the moderating effect ego-resilience has on the relationship between adolescents' career path anxiety and their psychological well-being.



The moderating effect on the relationship between career path anxiety and psychological well-being.

Discussion

Major conclusions from this research are as follows:

First, the deciding factors on the middle schooler's psychological well-being are ego-resilience, career path anxiety, economic status, and academic status, consecutively. With a middle school student's egoresilience being higher, career path anxiety lower, economic status higher, and academic status higher, the probability of reaching psychological well-being gets higher. Various approaches should be used because a middle school student's ego-resilience gets influenced at the individual level, family level, and school level. A student's family economic status influence the adolescent, with lower parents' income causing lower chance of psychological well-being. Also, academic status and career path anxiety have negative effect on psychological wellbeing. From middle school, not only does the academic workload increases but also students get sensitive about grades, exams and studies, as they are evaluated by teachers strictly based on grades and competitiveness among peers intensify. These also may result in struggles in interpersonal relationships and pose as obstacles in keeping up with studies. Therefore, intervention is needed to help mitigate students' anxiety through healthy

development and psychological adaptation. In order to bring about adolescents' psychological well-being, preventive and problem-solving programs need to be devised by thoroughly understanding the environmental factors that surround them at home and at school.

Secondly, this research proved that ego-resilience can moderate the effect a middle school student's anxiety about career path has on his or her psychological wellbeing. In other words, an adolescent with high egoresilience are exposed to less negative influence on the psychological well-being from the career path anxiety, while a student with low ego-resilience may experience greater negative effects from the anxiety. In summary, the career path anxiety and ego-resilience are in a reciprocal interaction, together affecting psychological well-being with the ego-resilience mitigating negative effects on psychological well-being and career path anxiety. As the ego-resilience gets higher, the career path anxiety reduces, having positive influence on the adolescent's health and adaptation to transitions. Considering these results, egoresilience plays a positive influence on adolescents who experience career path related anxiety in their transitions, having a close relationship with increased psychological well-being. In conclusion, it is crucial to come up with programs to improve adolescents' ego-resilience. Egoresilience alleviates problematic behaviors that result from stress, and improves the ability to active problemsolving. Educational and various supports are required to strengthen ego-resilience. Interpersonal relationship building skills can be improved through different handson activities and group activities, as individuals interact with persons from different environments. The school curriculum should include hands-on activities such as psychological experiments which are geared toward intensifying ego-resilience to mitigate the anxiety adolescents have about their career path.

This research poses few limitations despite the founding's. Generalizing the results can be limited as the survey targeted students in one specific region, and this factor should be considered in interpreting the research results. Also, not every variables that affect adolescents' psychological well-being could be considered. These limitations should be overcome by developing a new model that includes diverse variables on the adolescents' career path anxiety, based on continuing researches in the future.

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