Prophetic: Professional, Empathy and Islamic Counseling Journal
Vol. 9, No. 1, June 2026, 62-71
https://doi.org/10.24235/prophetic.v9i1.24001
e-ISSN: 2685-0702, p-ISSN: 2654-3958
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Faculty of Da'wah and Islamic Communication, UIN Siber Syekh Nurjati Cirebon
Available online at: https://journal1.uinssc.ac.id/index.php/prophetic/index

Differences in Career Anxiety of Senior High School Students by Gender: A Comparative Study in East Java

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Received: 1/07/2026; Revised: 20/07/2026; Accepted: 28/07/2026

Abstract

Career anxiety is commonly experienced by high school students as they face increasing demands for educational and career planning. However, evidence regarding gender differences in career anxiety at the senior high school level, particularly in Indonesia, remains limited. This study aimed to examine the level of career anxiety among senior high school (or equivalent) students in East Java and determine whether significant differences exist based on gender. A quantitative comparative design was employed involving 128 students (36 males and 92 females) selected through cluster sampling from several senior high schools in East Java. Data were collected using a career anxiety scale with strong psychometric properties (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.927). The data were analyzed using normality and homogeneity tests followed by an Independent Samples t-test. The findings indicated that students generally experienced a moderate level of career anxiety. Female students obtained a slightly higher mean score (M = 79.95) than male students (M = 76.72); however, the difference was not statistically significant (t = -1.137, df = 126, p = .258). These findings suggest that gender is not a significant predictor of career anxiety among high school students. Instead, career anxiety may be more strongly influenced by individual factors, such as self-confidence and career readiness, as well as contextual support. Therefore, career guidance and counseling services should focus on strengthening career readiness, self-confidence, and career decision-making skills while providing equal support for all students regardless of gender.

Keywords: *Guidance and counseling; career anxiety; gender; high school students; senior high school.*

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence, especially at the secondary education level, is a developmental phase characterized by various important developmental tasks, one of which is career planning and selection. Career is an important aspect of an individual's life because it is directly related to the future direction and self-actualization (Suharto et al., 2025). Donald Super's theory introduces the concept *life-span* and *life-space* where the main focus on this theory is that career development is a lifelong process that includes several stages, namely the stages of growth, exploration, formation, maintenance, and release (Dede et al., 2019). At this stage, students are faced with the demand to determine the direction of further study and work choices, so that cognitive, emotional, and careful planning are needed so that the decisions taken are in accordance with their potential and condition (Sharf, 2012).

In addition to theory *life-span* and *life-space* from Donald Super, career anxiety in this study can also be understood through *Career Construction Theory* and *Social Cognitive Career Theory*, which emphasizes that the process of individual career adaptation is influenced by the interaction between personal factors, environment, and learning experience (Wang et al., 2024). Concept *career adaptability*

It is also relevant to explain how individual preparedness in the face of career changes and uncertainties can reduce the level of career anxiety experienced (Boo et al., 2021)

The phenomenon of career anxiety found in research Ananda et al (2025) which shows that 50.6% of adolescents experience anxiety in making decisions about their college majors. The findings are in line with various other studies that indicate that students at the upper secondary level have a tendency to have relatively high levels of career anxiety (Adnan & Bhakti, 2025; Karamoy et al., 2023). In addition, the research conducted Zulfahmi & Andriany (2021) found that low levels of anxiety symptoms facilitate the process of career decision-making and the achievement of career goals. Collectively, the findings illustrate an interrelated pattern: career anxiety is not only experienced by many students in the further education decision-making process (Ananda et al., 2025) , but also tend to be at relatively high levels at the high school level in general (Adnan & Bhakti, 2025; Karamoy et al., 2023), and in turn affect the quality and accuracy of the career decisions students make (Zulfahmi & Andriany, 2021). Thus, the series of studies confirms that career anxiety is a widespread phenomenon and has a direct impact on the career decision-making readiness of high school students, making it an important basis for this study to further examine gender factors that have not been touched much explicitly by these studies.

These studies are strengthened by the results of a preliminary study conducted by researchers in interviews with BK teachers at SMK Singosari which showed that there were a number of students who experienced career anxiety with a fairly prominent intensity. This form of anxiety is shown through excessive fear of possible failure, as well as the emergence of a pessimistic attitude towards the future of work. In addition, some students are also not able to make career choices independently and tend to depend on the direction of others. In terms of competency readiness, school counselors revealed that the ability to *soft skills* students are still inadequate. This can be seen when students take part in job selection training, where they show low self-resilience, lack of confidence, and easily give up when facing challenges. This condition indicates that students not only experience obstacles in the aspect of career planning, but also in psychological readiness to enter the world of work. In addition, based on preliminary data conducted by researchers on high school students at several schools in East Java Regency, it shows that as many as 71.9% of students feel career anxiety. Career anxiety arises due to limited skills, low confidence, and pressure from family (Purwaningsih & Multisari, 2026), tight job competition, and immature understanding of students' interests and talents (Khadijah et al., 2025).

Career is an important issue in the realm of guidance and counseling, because anxiety about future careers creates negative effects of long distance on people (Jannah & Cahyawulan, 2023). Conditions caused by career anxiety include low self-confidence, impaired psychological well-being (Maghfiroh & Dewi, 2023), as well as the emergence of doubts and uncertainties in career decision-making (Sholikah et al., 2025). This condition shows that career anxiety not only affects the emotional aspects of individuals, but can also hinder the overall career development process. Anxiety that is not properly managed can hinder the process of career exploration, lower confidence, and affect the quality of decision-making (Setiawan & Musslifah, 2023).

Anxiety about future careers is a condition when individuals experience feelings of fear, worry, anxiety, and insecurity about their abilities and conditions, resulting in negative thoughts related to the future of their career. This anxiety can also be understood as an unpleasant emotional state related to various developmental demands that individuals must face, as well as having an impact on affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects (Ramanda, 2023). Research Febriana & Masykur (2021) and Ramanda (2023) Stating that individual characteristics such as gender, birth order, and level of self-efficacy also affect anxiety levels and decision-making ability For example, some studies show that women tend to have higher levels of anxiety than men when faced with academic decisions due to different emotional sensitivities and social pressures (Assyifa et al., 2023; Mariah et al., 2020).

Although various studies have examined career anxiety, studies that specifically examine career anxiety of students at the high school/equivalent level taking into account gender differences are still relatively limited. In addition, findings on the role of gender in career anxiety still show inconsistent results: some studies report that women tend to have higher levels of anxiety than men (Assyifa et al., 2023; Mariah et al., 2020; Ramanda, 2023), while other studies have found that gender has no significant effect on anxiety or career maturity (Febriana & Masykur, 2021; Yusuf & Daharnis, 2017). The inconsistency of these findings shows that there is a research gap (*research gap*) that need to be studied further, especially at the high school/equivalent level. Meanwhile, in this phase, students are faced with demands to determine the future direction, both in continuing their education and entering the world of work. Differences in psychological characteristics between men and women have the potential to influence the way individuals perceive, respond, and manage anxiety about their future careers. Therefore, this study is important to describe the level of career anxiety of students and examine the difference in career anxiety reviewed by gender in high school students / equivalent in East Java. The novelty of this study lies in the provision of the latest empirical evidence regarding differences in career anxiety by gender in the context of high school students, which can be the basis for the development of career guidance and counseling services that are more responsive and targeted in supporting career readiness and psychological well-being of students.

METHOD

This study uses quantitative research with a comparative approach that aims to describe and see the difference in the state of career anxiety of high school/equivalent students in East Java reviewed from gender. The variable in this study was career anxiety. The population in this study is final adolescent students in the age range of 15-18 years. Sampling in this study used *cluster sampling*, i.e. sampling techniques based on groups or clusters (Scott, 2019). In this study, the cluster used was a high school/equivalent that was the location of the research. After several schools were determined as research clusters, students from those schools were made respondents according to the research criteria. Based on this, the sample in this study is 128 students consisting of 36 male students and 92 female students.

The research instruments used are *Career Anxiety Scale* developed by (Tsai et al., 2017) and adapted from Ariyani (2024). The scale adaptation process is carried out by contacting the instrument owner to obtain a use permit, then adjusting the wording of the statement item to suit the needs and context of the research. This scale measures four main aspects of career anxiety, namely: personal ability, irrational beliefs about work, work environment, and professional education training. The scale consists of 25 statement items. The validity of the instrument item is tested using the item-rest correlation value (equivalent to the corrected item-total correlation) through the JASP program. An item is declared valid if the calculated r value is greater than the table r (N = 128; significance level of 5%) of 0.174. The test results showed that the r-value calculated on all 25 items ranged from 0.2543 to 0.7461, so that all items were declared valid (Table 1). In addition, the reliability of the instrument is stated to be high based on the value of the coefficient *Cronbach's Alpha* by 0.927 which indicates a high level of reliability.

Table 1. Item-Rest Correlation Test Results

No.	Item	r count	Remarks
1.	Item 1	0,2543	Valid
2.	Item 2	0,3173	Valid
3.	Item 3	0,5350	Valid
4.	Item 4	0,4446	Valid
5.	Item 5	0,5913	Valid
6.	Item 6	0,5719	Valid
7.	Item 7	0,3073	Valid

No.	Item	r count	Remarks
8.	Item 8	0,6135	Valid
9.	Item 9	0,6256	Valid
10.	Item 10	0,6819	Valid
11.	Item 11	0,4187	Valid
12.	Item 12	0,6483	Valid
13.	Item 13	0,5455	Valid
14.	Item 14	0,6823	Valid
15.	Item 15	0,3775	Valid
16.	Item 16	0,6184	Valid
17.	Item 17	0,5515	Valid
18.	Item 18	0,6656	Valid
19.	Item 19	0,6752	Valid
20.	Item 20	0,5140	Valid
21.	Item 21	0,6058	Valid
22.	Item 22	0,6452	Valid
23.	Item 23	0,7057	Valid
24.	Item 24	0,6538	Valid
25.	Item 25	0,7461	Valid

Data analysis was carried out using SPSS *Statistic Version 25 software*, which included normality tests (*Kolmogrov-Smirnov),* homogeneity tests (*Levene's Test*), and difference tests using *Independent Sample T-test* to test the significance of differences between the two groups. Career anxiety level categories (low, medium, high) were determined based on group norms using mean and standard total score deviations, with low categories for scores below (mean – 1SD), medium categories for scores between (mean – 1SD) to (mean + 1SD), and high categories for scores above (mean + 1SD). To strengthen the interpretation of the results of the Independent Sample T-test, this study also calculated the effect size using Cohen's d. The results of the analysis were used as a basis for determining the acceptance or rejection of the hypothesis of the difference in career anxiety levels between male and female students.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to identify differences in career anxiety levels between male and female high school/equivalent students in East Java. The research data was obtained from 128 students, consisting of 36 male students and 92 female students. Data collection was carried out using a career anxiety scale that has undergone validity and reliability tests, with *a Cronbach's Alpha* coefficient value of 0.927 indicating that the instrument has a high level of reliability.

Table 2. Distribution of Career Anxiety Levels

No.	Gender	Category	Number of Students	Percentage
1.	Male	Low	10	27,8%
		Medium	21	58,3%
		Height	5	13,9%
	Total		36	100%
2.	Women	Low	17	18,5%
		Medium	71	77,2%
		Height	4	4,3%
	Total		92	100%

Based on Table 2, it is known that most of the students, both male and female, are in the category of moderate career anxiety. However, female students showed a larger proportion in the medium category, namely 71 students (77.2%) compared to male students as many as 21 students (58.3%). In the low category, male students showed a greater percentage (27.8%) than female students (18.5%). Meanwhile, in the high category, male students also have a larger percentage (13.9%) than female students (4.3%). This shows that there is a difference in the distribution of career anxiety levels by gender, although in the majority of both groups are in the medium category.

Table 3. Normality Test Results (*Kolmogrov-Smirnov*)

No.	Gender		Kolmogorov-Smirnova		
			Statistic	df	Say.
1.	Career Anxiety	Male	.124	36	.180
2.		Women	.091	92	.200*

The results of the normality test using *Kolmogorov-Smirnov* showed that a significance value was obtained in the male group of 0.180 and in the female group of 0.200. All of these significance values have a greater than 0.05, so it can be concluded that the career anxiety data of men and women is normally distributed.

Table 4. Homogeneity Test Results

No.	Variabel	df1	df2	Say.	Remarks
1.	Career Anxiety	1	126	.066	Homogeneous

The results of the homogeneity test showed a significance value of 0.066 (>0.05), so it can be concluded that career anxiety between male and female students is homogeneous.

Table 5. Independent *Sample T-Test Results*

No.	Variabel	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Remarks
1.	Career Anxiety	-1.137	126	.258	Insignificant

The basis for decision-making in the independent sample t-test is based on significance values. If the Sig. < 0.05, then H0 is rejected and H1 is accepted, which means that there is a significant difference in career anxiety between male and female students. Conversely, if the Sig. value > 0.05, then H0 is accepted and H1 is rejected, meaning there is no significant difference in career anxiety between the two groups. Thus, the results of this test can show whether gender is a distinguishing factor in the level of career anxiety of students.

Based on the results of the *Independent Sample T-Test* in Table 5, a value of t = -1.137 was obtained with a significance (Sig. 2-tailed) of 0.258 (>0.05). This shows that there is no significant difference between the career anxiety levels of male and female students. Thus, the hypothesis that states the existence of differences is rejected and the null hypothesis is accepted. The calculation of the effect size (Cohen's d) yielded a value of 0.22, which according to Cohen's criteria is classified as *a small effect*, so that in addition to being not statistically significant, the magnitude of the difference in average career anxiety between the two groups is also relatively small practically. So it can be concluded that gender is not a factor that distinguishes students' career anxiety statistically or practically.

These findings are in line with research Sholikah et al (2025) which shows that career anxiety is a phenomenon that is quite commonly experienced by students at the secondary school level. In this phase, students are at the stage of career exploration, which is the stage when individuals begin to think about further education options or future employment, which often causes worry and uncertainty (Sharf, 2013). Therefore, career anxiety experienced by students, both men and women, is a natural thing to occur at this stage of development.

Table 6. Descriptive Test Results

No.		Gender	N	Red	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
1.	Career anxiety	Male	36	76.7222	16.98674	2.83112
		Women	92	79.9457	13.31063	1.38773

Based on the results of descriptive statistical analysis, it is known that the average level of career anxiety of female students (M = 79.95) is higher than that of male students (M = 76.72). However, the average difference is relatively small. In addition, the standard deviation in the male group was greater than in the females, which suggests that the level of career anxiety in male students is more varied.

Descriptively, the results showed that female students had a slightly higher average career anxiety than male students. These differences can be influenced by biological and psychosocial factors, where women tend to have higher emotional sensitivity and face different social pressures (Ananda et al.,

2025). However, the difference is relatively small. In addition, the variation in the data in male students was greater than in females, suggesting that career anxiety levels in male students were more diverse, while in female students tended to be more uniform. This condition causes differences between groups to be insignificant.

The results of this study are in line with several previous studies that also found no significant differences based on sex. Yusuf & Daharnis (2017) states that career development does not show a significant difference in view of gender. Similar findings were also obtained in the study which showed that there was no difference in career maturity when viewed from gender with a significance value of 0.438 ($p > 0.05$). In addition, the research Febriana & Masykur (2021) and Ramanda (2023) It also indicates that anxiety or career readiness is not always directly influenced by gender, but rather by other, more dominant factors. On the other hand, some studies do show that women tend to have higher levels of anxiety. However, the results of this study show that these differences are not always consistent. This can be interpreted that career anxiety is not enough to be explained through gender differences alone, but needs to be seen from various other factors that affect individuals.

The absence of a difference in career anxiety between men and women can be understood through changes in gender roles in society. Both men and women have relatively equal opportunities in education and the world of work (Nugraha, 2022). Women are no longer limited to domestic roles, but also have a high career orientation. This condition makes the pressure and demands on the future of the career relatively equal between the two (Hou et al., 2019). Viewed from perspective *Social Cognitive Career Theory*, equality of educational and career opportunities experienced by male and female students in the context of this study also shaped self-confidence (*self-efficacy*) and expected outcomes (*outcome expectation*) which is relatively equal between the two groups, so that the level of career anxiety experienced does not differ significantly. These findings are also in line with the concept *career adaptability*, which emphasizes that an individual's readiness for a career transition is determined more by personal adaptive resources such as self-confidence and decision-making skills, rather than by gender alone (Jiang et al., 2024). This explanation is reinforced by the construct *Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy* (CDMSE) in *Social Cognitive Career Theory*, which confirms that an individual's confidence in his or her ability to make career decisions is a stronger predictor of career anxiety than demographic categories such as type (Betz & Luzzo, 1996). This is also in line with the results of the study Budi et al (2025) which identifies that CDMSE is consistently an important antecedent for high school students' career decision-making readiness, regardless of gender differences.

Career anxiety in this study was more influenced by internal factors such as self-confidence (Purwaningsih & Multisari, 2026; Zulfahmi & Andriany, 2021), skill readiness, and understanding of interests and talents. External factors such as family support, career information, and working conditions also play a role. In addition, strengthening the meaning of life (*meaning in life*) in adolescents has also been shown to play an important role in reducing the uncertainty of career expectations, especially in female students (Guo, 2025), while self-efficacy in job search (*job search self-efficacy*) has been shown to mediate the relationship between social support and anxiety about the world of work (Carkit, 2025). This shows that career anxiety is the result of the interaction of various factors, not solely because of gender.

Theoretically, the lack of this difference in career anxiety by gender is in line with the theory *life-span* and *life-space* of Donald Super, who views career development as a universal process that every individual goes through through the same stages regardless of gender. However, these findings also show a discrepancy with the assumptions of some previous studies departing from the perspective of traditional gender roles, which predict that women will experience higher career anxiety due to the burden of dual roles and emotional sensitivity (Kelmendi & Jemini-Gashi, 2022; Ullah, 2025). These differences in results indicate that the relevance of traditional gender role theories in explaining career anxiety is beginning to diminish as equality of educational and career opportunities for men and women

expands. These findings also support *Social Cognitive Career Theory* which places cognitive-personal variables such as self-efficacy and career adaptability as stronger predictors of career anxiety than demographic variables such as gender (Brown & Lent, 2019).

These findings provide important implications for the development of career guidance and counseling services in high school. First, because career anxiety is proven to be undifferentiated by gender (Betz & Luzzo, 1996), career BK service programs should be designed in a *Unisex* or apply equally to all students, instead of creating separate programs based on gender. Second, given that career anxiety is more influenced by internal factors such as self-confidence and decision-making readiness, counselors need to develop programs to strengthen career self-efficacy (*career self-efficacy*) (Elfina & Andriany, 2023), for example through group counseling that focuses on emotion regulation and career goal setting. Third, referring to the concept *career adaptability* which includes dimensions *Concern* (concern for the future of career), control (self-control in decision-making), *curiosity* (exploration of career options), and *confidence* (self-confidence) (Haenggli & Hirschi, 2020), BK services can be designed in the form of classical career exploration guidance as well as decision-making skills training to strengthen the four dimensions as a whole. Fourth, adequate career information services and the involvement of family support also need to be strengthened, considering that external factors also contribute to students' career anxiety (Karakus et al., 2026; Marcionetti & Zammitti, 2025). Fifth, referring to the findings Budi et al (2025) counselors are advised to develop interventions that specifically target reinforcement *Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy* (CDMSE) as the main antecedent of career readiness, and includes strengthening the meaning of life *(meaning in life*) into career guidance programs to help students clarify their future expectations (Guo, 2025). Thus, it can be concluded that career anxiety is a complex phenomenon and is influenced by various factors, both internal and external, so guidance and counseling services need to be designed holistically and not based on the assumption of gender differences.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that career anxiety is a common concern among senior high school students as they prepare for future educational and career transitions. Although female students demonstrated slightly higher levels of career anxiety than male students, gender did not significantly differentiate career anxiety. These findings suggest that career anxiety should not be understood primarily as a gender-related issue but rather as a multidimensional phenomenon that is likely influenced by individual characteristics, such as career readiness and self-confidence, as well as contextual support. By providing empirical evidence from Indonesian senior high school students, this study contributes to the limited literature on gender differences in career anxiety and supports a more evidence-based understanding of career development during adolescence.

The findings have important implications for guidance and counseling practice. Rather than implementing gender-specific interventions, school counselors should prioritize comprehensive career guidance programs that strengthen students' career readiness, career decision-making competence, self-confidence, and understanding of their interests, abilities, and future opportunities. Such preventive and developmental services may better equip students to manage career-related concerns and make informed educational and occupational decisions. Although this study provides valuable insights, its findings should be interpreted in light of the unequal gender distribution of participants, the cross-sectional design, and the use of self-report measures. Future research is therefore encouraged to include more balanced and diverse samples, employ longitudinal or mixed-methods designs, and investigate additional psychological and contextual factors, including career decision-making self-efficacy, parental support, career adaptability, and socioeconomic background, to advance a more comprehensive understanding of career anxiety among adolescents.

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