

Future Anxiety Among University Students: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Future anxiety refers to a form of anxiety related to individuals' concerns about an uncertain future. This phenomenon is increasingly observed among young adults, particularly university students and individuals undergoing the transition from education to the workforce. This article aims to systematically review studies that examine the concept of future anxiety, the factors influencing it, and its impact on psychological well-being. The method employed was a literature review of empirical articles published within the last ten years. The findings indicate that future anxiety is influenced by internal factors such as self-efficacy and optimism, as well as external factors including career uncertainty and social pressure. High levels of future anxiety can negatively affect individuals' mental health, leading to increased stress and decreased psychological well-being. Therefore, special attention is needed in the development of preventive efforts and psychological interventions for groups vulnerable to experiencing future anxiety.

Keywords: Career Uncertainty, Future anxiety, Final year students, Job Readiness

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INTRODUCTION

Future anxiety refers to a form of anxiety oriented toward the future, characterized by excessive worry about uncertain events and life conditions that may occur (Zaleski et al., 2017). This phenomenon is commonly experienced by final-year university students who are transitioning from higher education to the workforce. Uncertainty regarding employment opportunities, increasingly competitive labor markets, and social as well as family expectations are among the major factors contributing to heightened future anxiety (Hanim & Ahlas, 2020; Muqarrama et al., 2022). These conditions not only affect students' readiness to enter the workforce but also have significant implications for their mental health and psychological well-being (Maghfiroh & Dewi, 2023).

Previous studies have reported that *future anxiety* is influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors include self-efficacy, optimism, and work readiness, whereas external factors encompass career uncertainty, social pressure, and labor market conditions (Siti Eva, 2022; Syuhadak et al., 2022). However, existing findings remain fragmented across different research contexts, making it difficult to obtain a

comprehensive understanding of the determinants and consequences of *future anxiety* among university students. Therefore, this study aims to conduct a **Systematic Literature Review (SLR)** to identify the concept, influencing factors, and impacts of *future anxiety* on university students, providing a foundation for the development of more effective psychological prevention and intervention strategies.

METHOD

This study employed a **Systematic Literature Review (SLR)** approach following the **Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA)** guidelines. The literature search was conducted using **Google Scholar** as the primary database through the **Publish or Perish (PoP)** application with the keyword *future anxiety*. All retrieved articles were managed using **Mendeley** to identify and remove duplicate records.

The article selection process followed the four stages of the PRISMA framework: **identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion**. A total of 110 articles were identified during the initial search. After removing 12 duplicate records, the remaining articles were screened based on their titles and abstracts. Subsequently, 36 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility according to the predefined inclusion criteria. Twenty-six articles were excluded because they did not directly address *future anxiety* or were not relevant to the objectives of this study. Finally, 10 articles met all inclusion criteria and were included in the review.

The selected studies were analyzed using a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were synthesized by identifying the concept of *future anxiety*, the factors influencing its occurrence, and its psychological impacts on university students. The findings were then organized into thematic categories to provide a comprehensive understanding of *future anxiety* in the context of higher education.

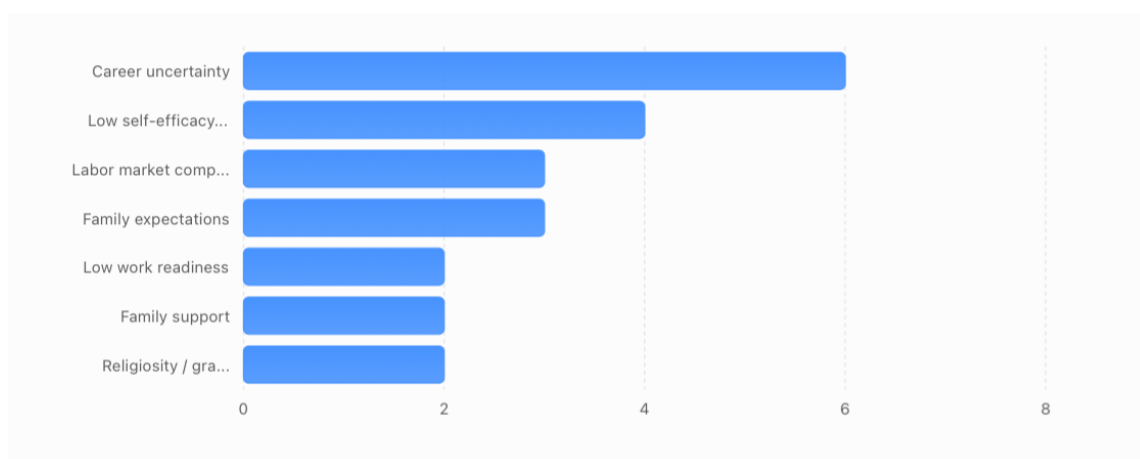
FINDING AND DISCUSSION

RESEARCH RESULT

Table 1: Summary of the Reviewed Studies

No.	Author(s)	Identified Factors	Main Findings
1	Sa'adah (2020)	Social relationship difficulties, guilt	Existential-humanistic counseling reduced <i>future anxiety</i> .
2	Maghfiroh & Dewi (2023)	Career anxiety	Career anxiety was associated with lower psychological well-being.
3	Hanim & Ahlas (2020)	Work experience, work readiness	Future orientation was associated with lower career anxiety.
4	Syuhadak et al. (2022)	Career adaptation	Students experienced expectations and anxiety

			regarding their future careers.
5	Wulandari & Fridari (2024)	Fear of unemployment	Coping strategies helped reduce <i>future anxiety</i> .
6	Muqarrama et al. (2022)	Career uncertainty, family expectations	Career anxiety increased in the era of Industry 4.0.
7	Anugrawaty et al. (2023)	Family support, religiosity	Family support functioned as a protective factor.
8	Siti Eva (2022)	Self-efficacy, work readiness	Self-efficacy and work readiness predicted <i>future anxiety</i> .
9	Siregar et al. (2021)	Limited job opportunities	Gratitude contributed to reducing <i>future anxiety</i> .
10	Herman et al. (2024)	Career uncertainty	Positive affirmation significantly reduced <i>future anxiety</i> .



Frequency of Factors Influencing *Future Anxiety*

Research Results

The literature search process identified a total of 110 articles from Google Scholar using the **Publish or Perish (PoP)** application. Following the removal of 12 duplicate records, 98 articles remained for the screening stage. Based on the titles and abstracts, 62 articles were excluded because they did not meet the objectives of this review. Subsequently, 36 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility, and 26 articles were excluded because they did not satisfy the predefined inclusion criteria. Consequently, 10 articles were included in the final analysis.

The selected studies primarily focused on university students, particularly final-year students who were preparing for the transition from higher education to the

workforce. Across the reviewed articles, *future anxiety* was consistently reported as a psychological issue associated with uncertainty regarding future careers, employment opportunities, and life after graduation.

The findings revealed that the factors influencing *future anxiety* could be classified into two broad categories: internal and external factors. Internal factors included low self-efficacy, low optimism, inadequate work readiness, and low self-confidence. External factors comprised career uncertainty, labor market competition, family expectations, social pressure, limited employment opportunities, and insufficient family support.

The reviewed studies also reported several consequences associated with *future anxiety*. The most frequently identified outcomes included increased stress levels, reduced psychological well-being, difficulties in career planning, impaired decision-making, and decreased confidence in facing future challenges. In addition, several studies identified protective factors that may reduce *future anxiety*, including family support, religiosity, gratitude, positive affirmation, and psychological counseling interventions.

A summary of the characteristics and principal findings of the reviewed studies is presented in **Table 1**. Furthermore, the frequency of factors influencing *future anxiety* identified across the reviewed articles is presented in **Figure 2**, demonstrating that career uncertainty was the most frequently reported factor, followed by low self-efficacy or self-confidence, labor market competition, family expectations, low work readiness, family support, and religiosity or gratitude.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this systematic literature review indicate that *future anxiety* is a prominent psychological issue among university students, particularly those in their final year who are preparing to transition from higher education to the workforce. The reviewed studies consistently demonstrate that *future anxiety* arises from the interaction between internal and external factors. Internal factors, such as low self-efficacy, limited work readiness, low self-confidence, and pessimism, reduce students' ability to cope with uncertainty. At the same time, external factors, including career uncertainty, labor market competition, family expectations, and social pressure, further intensify concerns about future life and employment. These findings suggest that *future anxiety* is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by both personal psychological resources and environmental conditions.

The results of this review are consistent with previous studies. Hanim and Ahlas (2020) reported that students with a stronger future orientation tend to experience lower levels of career anxiety. Similarly, Muqarrama et al. (2022) found that uncertainty regarding employment opportunities and rapid changes in the labor market contribute significantly to career-related anxiety among final-year students. Furthermore, the findings support the study by Maghfiroh and Dewi (2023), which demonstrated that higher levels of career anxiety are associated with lower psychological well-being. In addition, studies conducted by Siregar et al. (2021) and Anugrawaty et al. (2023) highlighted the protective roles of gratitude, religiosity, and family support in reducing *future anxiety*. The consistency of these

findings across different studies strengthens the evidence that *future anxiety* is shaped by multiple psychological and social factors.

Despite these findings, this review has several limitations. First, the literature search was limited to articles indexed in Google Scholar, which may have excluded relevant studies available in other academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, or PubMed. Second, only ten studies met the inclusion criteria, limiting the breadth of evidence synthesized in this review. Third, differences in research designs, sample characteristics, and measurement instruments across the selected studies may have influenced the consistency and comparability of the reported findings.

The findings of this review have several practical implications. Universities are encouraged to develop comprehensive programs aimed at reducing *future anxiety* by strengthening students' psychological resources and career preparedness. Such programs may include career counseling, psychological counseling services, self-efficacy enhancement training, career planning workshops, and initiatives that promote family and social support. Future research is recommended to include broader databases, larger numbers of studies, and empirical investigations examining the effectiveness of psychological interventions in reducing *future anxiety* among university students. Such efforts would provide more comprehensive evidence to support the development of effective prevention and intervention strategies.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review concludes that *future anxiety* is a significant psychological issue experienced by university students, particularly those in their final year as they prepare to transition into the workforce. The reviewed studies indicate that *future anxiety* is influenced by a combination of internal factors, including low self-efficacy, limited work readiness, low self-confidence, and pessimism, as well as external factors such as career uncertainty, labor market competition, family expectations, and social pressure. These factors contribute to adverse psychological outcomes, including increased stress, reduced psychological well-being, difficulties in career planning, and impaired decision-making.

The findings highlight the importance of strengthening both psychological resources and career preparedness to reduce *future anxiety* among university students. Higher education institutions should consider implementing career development programs, psychological counseling services, and interventions designed to enhance self-efficacy and career readiness. Future studies are encouraged to include a wider range of academic databases, incorporate a larger number of eligible studies, and examine the effectiveness of evidence-based psychological interventions. Such efforts will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of *future anxiety* and support the development of effective prevention and intervention strategies for university students.

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