

## An Investigation of Career Indecision Level of High School Students: Relationships with Personal Indecisiveness and Anxiety\*

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### Abstract

The main aim of this paper is to examine whether high school student's personal indecisiveness and state-trait anxiety can be used to predict their indecision with regards to their careers. This study also investigates the effects of other factors, such as gender, school type, grade level, decision status and how much help they receive, on the career indecision of high school students. The study group consists of 319 students (197 female and 122 male) in high schools. Multiple Regression Analysis and *t* test were used to analyse the data. Together, exploratory indecisiveness scale scores and state anxiety scale scores accounted for a significant proportion of the variance (20%) of career indecision. Exploratory indecisiveness is shown to be the most powerful predictor of career indecision. It was found that career indecision scores and five sub-scale scores of the students varied significantly when decision status and school type were considered.

**Keywords:** career indecision, personal indecisiveness, exploratory indecisiveness, impetuous indecisiveness, state-trait anxiety

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One of the most significant times in an individual's life is when they make a decision regarding the course their life will take. Individuals are faced with the obligation to make a decision during almost all of life's phases (Creed, Patton, & Prideaux, 2006; Hartung, Porfeli, & Vondracek, 2005). While not all decisions are of great consequence some may be of high importance for the individual and impact their life. Decisions can be easy to make but can also be difficult, complicated and stressful (Gati, Krausz, & Osipow, 1996). One example of the latter are those a person takes regarding their career. Every individual makes career choices at certain stages of their life which can determine the job they will have in the future (Hamamcı & Hamurlu, 2005). If a person gets confused over making choices regarding their career, even if they are at the right age to be doing so, and frequently changes their mind it can be said that they are having career indecision (Kuzgun, 2006). Therefore, one of the most important research subjects in career psychology is the difficulties that discourage individuals when making decisions over their careers, how the decision making process is determined and how career indecision is handled; this is done by understanding career indecision dynamics (Germeijs & De Boeck, 2002).

Making a choice which has multiple effects on one's life is a challenging event in this era due to the changes and developments in technology and industry which has resulted in the emergence of new professions and careers. This, in turn, has increased the number of choices which have to be made regarding careers and has made the process more complicated. This can cause the individual to experience career indecision (Kuzgun, 2006). Unless a person's career decisions are made in line with their life preferences then the person's career can be negatively affected. Decisions regarding careers are difficult and complicated (Öztemel, 2012). Therefore, determining the difficulties individuals face in the decision making process and dealing with career indecision by understanding its dynamics have become one of the most important research issues in career psychology (Creed et al., 2006; Germeijs & De Boeck, 2002).

Studies conducted for the purpose of determining the variables which career indecision is associated with examined the relationships between the variables such as, professional maturity and irrational beliefs (Hamamcı & Çoban, 2007), career beliefs (Akkoç, 2012), parental styles and attachment (Cenkseven-Önder, Kırdök, & Işık, 2010), self-respect and self-confidence (Kishor, 1981; Santos, 2001), self-efficacy (Betz, Klein, & Taylor, 1996; Gati et al., 2011; Guay, Ratelle, Senécal, Larose, & Deschênes, 2006), locus of control (Fuqua, Blum, & Hartman, 1988; Santos & Ferreira, 2012), psychological difficulties for an

individual leaving their family and other important people (Blustein, Walbridge, Friedlander, & Palladino, 1991; Tokar, Withrow, Hall, & Moradi, 2003) and career indecision. Other studies have covered the relationship between career indecision and chronic (personal) indecisiveness and anxiety (Campagna & Curtis, 2007; Fuqua, Seaworth, & Newman, 1987; Santos & Ferreira, 2012). This paper will examine the relationship between the career indecision of high school students with the variables personal indecisiveness and anxiety.

Personal indecisiveness, also known as the concept of general indecisiveness (Gati et al., 1996) or chronic indecisiveness (Osipow, 1999), is a type of indecisiveness which can make an individual's entire life difficult, including their career decisions (Bacanlı, 2005; Cooper, Fuqua, & Hartman, 1984; Gati et al., 1996; Germeijs & De Boeck, 2002). Personal indecisiveness is not a normal part of human development but a personal characteristic which can affect all decision making in life, including those associated with a career (Bacanlı, 2005; Osipow, 1999). Indecisiveness is already present in a person before career decisions have to be made (Gati et al., 1996) and is a problem which has important negative results (Gaffner & Hazler, 2002; Gati & Asher, 2001; Gati et al., 1996). Salamone (1982) defines indecisive individuals as having low self-confidence and low self-respect, being unhappy and highly emotional and inhibited, external locus of control and having the tendency to blame others. Personal indecisiveness is a type of indecision which has its roots in personality (Bacanlı, 2005). A number of studies mention that there is a relationship between career indecision and personal indecisiveness (e.g. Austin, Wagner & Dahl, 2004; Germeijs & De Boeck, 2002; Germeijs, Verschueren, & Soenens, 2006; Santos, 2001) and also state that the examination of career indecision and personal indecisiveness is important for psychological counselors (Osipow, 1999; Slaney, 1988). Therefore, it is useful to examine personal indecisiveness as it is an important determinant of career indecision.

In studies conducted with regards to career indecision, anxiety is dealt with as a relevant variable for most of the decision making types, including decisions regarding careers. Crites (1974) argues that high levels of anxiety affect decision making and career development. Hardin, Varghese, Tran and Carlson (2006) believe anxiety is related to career exploration and career attachment. In their study, in which the relationship between different components of career indecision and state-trait anxiety is examined, Fuqua, Seaworth and Newman (1987) report that anxiety has a significant relationship with some of the components of career indecision. McGowan (2004) examined whether career indecision and indecisiveness are associated with variables such as anxiety and vocational maturity. In this

experimental study, it was found that anxiety and vocational maturity do not differentiate significantly relative to career indecision and chronic indecisiveness. Campagna & Curtis (2007) reported that state anxiety is the strongest predictor of career indecision. All of this research shows that there is a strong relationship between career indecision and anxiety; hence anxiety levels should be assessed when trying to solve reasons for career indecision.

## Method

### *Participants*

A total of 197 female (62%) and 122 male (38%) students studying at various high schools in Ankara participated in the study. The ages of students ranged from 14 to 19 and the mean was 16.37 (SD = 0.80). 12% (n=38) of the students stated that they had consultants at their schools while 88% (280) stated that they did not have any assistance. 78% (n=251) of the students stated that they had already chosen their field of study (n=251) or their career while 22% (n=66) stated that they had not yet chosen (two people did not state their decision status).

### *Instruments*

*Career Decision Inventory (CDI)*. CDI was developed in order to measure the level of career indecision of high school students. Responses to the items are prepared as a 5-point Likert type rating scale (strongly agree-strongly disagree). The highest score that can be obtained from the scale is 150 and the lowest is 30. A low score shows career decisiveness while a high score shows career indecision. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the inventory is .85 (Çakır, 2004). The internal consistency coefficients estimated for the present study vary between .73 and .90 for sub-scales and were found to be .90 for the whole scale.

*Personal Indecisiveness Scale (PIS)*. Developed by Bacanlı in 2005, the scale is a 5-point Likert type scale and involves two subscales: exploratory indecisiveness and impetuous indecisiveness. A high score from the scale means that the personal indecisiveness level measured by that sub-scale is high. PIS structural validity was determined by factor analysis. Reliability coefficients of the scale are .90, .88, and .85 for the whole PIS, exploratory indecisiveness and impetuous indecisiveness respectively. Internal consistency coefficients calculated for the present study are .86 for both exploratory indecisiveness and impetuous indecisiveness subscales and .91 for the whole scale.

*State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI)*. STAI is a Likert-type scale which has 40 items: measuring state anxiety (20 items) and trait anxiety level (20 items). High scores show that the anxiety level is high. Reliability coefficients determined with Kuder–Richardson 20 formulas vary between .83 and .87 for Trait Anxiety Scale and vary between .94 and .96 for State Anxiety Scale (Öner & Le Compte, 1998). Internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) calculated for the present study was found to be .89 for state anxiety and .82 for trait anxiety.

*Personal Information Form*. The demographical data of the group was collected through a personal information form developed by the researcher. The personal information form includes data on age, gender, grade, school type, status of seeking assistance for career and field choice and state of career decision.

### *Data Analysis*

In order to analyze the data statistically; the Pearson Moments Multiple Correlation Technique was used to determine the correlations between career indecision, personal indecisiveness, and anxiety. Differences between students' career indecision levels according to gender, school type, decision status and assistance status were tested with *t* test. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare variations between grade levels. Finally, a multiple regression analysis was used to explore whether the effect of indecisiveness and anxiety significantly explain career indecision.

## Results

Career indecision of students who participated in the study was compared according to their gender, school type, grade level, decision status and whether they have sought assistance in consultations with regards to career decision making. As a result of the analysis performed, significant differences were not found in the career indecision of students with regards to gender, grade level and the seeking of assistance. According to school type and decision status, significant differences were found in career decision. The results can be seen below. Table 1 show the means, standard deviations, *t* values, and effect sizes for the total CDI and its subscales according to types of high school.

Table 1  
Differences between Vocational High School and General High School in the CDI

|                    | Technical and Vocational High School (n=89) |       | General High School (n=230) |       | t     | $\eta^2$ |
|--------------------|---|-------|-----------------------------|-------|-------|----------|
|                    | M   | SD    | M                           | SD    |       |          |
| Career Indecision  | 85.35                                       | 24.67 | 68.61                       | 24.49 | 5.47* | .086     |
| Internal Conflict  | 23.92                                       | 8.20  | 19.38                       | 8.69  | 4.25* | .054     |
| Knowing One's Self | 20.03                                       | 7.21  | 16.66                       | 6.60  | 3.99* | .048     |
| Lack of Knowledge  | 21.10                                       | 7.20  | 17.07                       | 6.75  | 4.69* | .065     |
| Irrational Beliefs | 10.12                                       | 4.10  | 7.71                        | 3.78  | 4.99* | .073     |
| External Conflict  | 10.19                                       | 4.45  | 7.79                        | 3.80  | 4.81* | .068     |

\*  $p < .001$

When Table 1 is examined, it can be seen that *t*-test analysis shows the career indecision of students studying at vocational and technical high schools in terms of career indecision whole test. The scores for internal conflict, knowing one's self, lack of knowledge, irrational beliefs and external conflict sub-scales were found to be significantly high ( $t_{(315)} = 5.47, p < .001, t_{(315)} = 4.25, p < .001, t_{(315)} = 3.99, p < .001, t_{(315)} = 4.69, p < .001, t_{(315)} = 4.99, p < .001, t_{(315)} = 4.81$ , respectively,  $p < .001$ ).

Considering the effect sizes, it was found that school type has a moderate level of effect on the whole test ( $\eta^2 = .086$ ), on the lack of knowledge ( $\eta^2 = .065$ ), irrational beliefs ( $\eta^2 = .073$ ) and external conflict sub-scales ( $\eta^2 = .068$ ) and a low level of effect on the internal conflict ( $\eta^2 = .054$ ) and the knowing one's self ( $\eta^2 = .048$ ) subscales (Büyüköztürk, 2011). According to these results, it can be said that type of high school is the most effective on career indecision whole test and the least effective on the knowing one's self sub-scale.

According to the decision making status of students participating in the study, mean (*M*) and standard deviation (*SD*) values and *t* test results in career indecision whole test and sub-scales are shown in Table 2.

As can be seen in Table 2, the *t*-test analysis performed shows that the career indecision of students who stated that they had not decided what career or field of study to choose was found to be significantly higher than the career indecision of students who had decided in the whole test and internal conflict, knowing one's self, lack of knowledge, irrational beliefs and external conflict sub-scales. ( $t_{(315)} = 8.42, p < .001, t_{(315)} = 9.26, p < .001, t_{(315)} = 6.05, p < .001, t_{(315)} = 6.37, p < .001, t_{(315)} = 5.57, p < .001, t_{(315)} = 4.72, p < .001$ , respectively) .

Table 2  
Differences between Undecided and Decided Students in the Total CDI and Sub-scales

| Scale              | Deciding according to career or field study |       |                 |       | t     | $\eta^2$ |
|--------------------|---|-------|-----------------|-------|-------|----------|
|                    | Undecided (n=66)                            |       | Decided (n=251) |       |       |          |
|                    | M   | SD    | M               | SD    |       |          |
| Career Indecision  | 94.45                                       | 19.81 | 67.55           | 23.87 | 8.42* | .184     |
| Internal Conflict  | 28.53                                       | 6.47  | 18.53           | 8.11  | 9.26* | .214     |
| Knowing one's self | 21.89                                       | 6.14  | 16.43           | 6.62  | 6.05* | .104     |
| Lack of knowledge  | 22.83                                       | 5.77  | 16.93           | 6.92  | 6.37* | .114     |
| Irrational Beliefs | 10.71                                       | 4.04  | 7.75            | 3.78  | 5.57* | .090     |
| External Conflict  | 10.48                                       | 4.27  | 7.90            | 3.87  | 4.72* | .066     |

\*  $p < .001$

Considering their impact level, the students' decision status has a high level of impact on the whole test ( $\eta^2=.184$ ) and the internal conflict sub-scale ( $\eta^2=.214$ ) and a medium level of impact on the knowing one's self ( $\eta^2=.104$ ), lack of knowledge ( $\eta^2=.114$ ), irrational beliefs ( $\eta^2=.090$ ) and external conflict ( $\eta^2=.066$ ) subscales (Büyüköztürk, 2011). According to these results, it can be said that the decision status is the most effective on internal conflict and the least effective on external conflict.

In the study, along with exploratory indecisiveness, impetuous indecisiveness and state-trait anxiety, the power of predicting career indecision were analysed with multiple regression analysis. Relationships between variables which are equal in the regression analysis are shown in Table 3.

Table 3  
The Pearson Correlations among Variables (N=319)

| Variables                     | M     | SD    | 1        | 2        | 3        | 4        |
|-------------------------------|-------|-------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Career Indecision             | 73.26 | 25.62 | .374 (*) | .314 (*) | .332 (*) | .363 (*) |
| 1. Exploratory Indecisiveness | 26.89 | 9.37  | -        | .687 (*) | .336 (*) | .582 (*) |
| 2. Impetuous Indecisiveness   | 19.48 | 7.78  |          | -        | .297 (*) | .445 (*) |
| 3. State Anxiety              | 42.31 | 12.27 |          |          | -        | .563 (*) |
| 4. Trait Anxiety              | 45.96 | 9.61  |          |          |          | -        |

\*  $p < .001$

In order to determine whether independent variables explain the amount of variance in career indecision, exploratory indecisiveness, impetuous indecisiveness, state-anxiety and trait anxiety were used as predictors in multiple regression analysis. The results can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4  
Results of Multiple Regression Analysis on Predicting Career Indecision

| Predictive Variables       | <i>B</i> | <i>SH</i> | $\beta$ | <i>t</i> |
|----------------------------|----------|-----------|---------|----------|
| Constant                   | 24.163   | 6.456     |         | 3.743    |
| Exploratory Indecisiveness | .529     | .210      | .193    | 2.519*   |
| Impetuous Indecisiveness   | .252     | .230      | .077    | 1.095    |
| State Anxiety              | .377     | .128      | .180    | 2.941**  |
| Trait Anxiety              | .305     | .189      | .115    | 1.615    |

Note:  $R = .45$ ;  $R^2 = .20$ ;  $F_{(4-314)} = 19.358$ ;

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

According to the regression analysis results, variables in the model significantly predict the career indecision total scores as a whole ( $R = .45$ ;  $R^2 = .20$ ;  $F_{(4-314)} = 19.358$ ,  $p = .000$ ). When Table 4 is examined, it can be seen that there is a positive relationship between exploratory indecisiveness ( $\beta = .193$ ,  $t = 2.519$ ,  $p < .05$ ), state anxiety ( $\beta = .128$ ,  $t = 2.941$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and career indecision. Impetuous indecisiveness ( $\beta = .077$ ,  $t = 1.095$ ,  $p > .05$ ) and trait anxiety ( $\beta = .115$ ,  $t = 1.615$ ,  $p > .05$ ) have no effect on predicting the total scores of career indecision. The variable which predicts career indecision the most is found to be exploratory indecisiveness ( $\beta = .193$ ).

### Discussion

In this study, the career indecision of high school students was examined in relation to some demographical variables (gender, school type, grade level and state of taking consultancy aid for career selection). Moreover, the researcher examined whether exploratory indecisiveness, impetuous indecisiveness, trait-anxiety and state-anxiety predict career indecision. According to the findings obtained, no significant differences were found in students' career indecision both in the test as a whole and at the sub-scales level according to gender, grade level and seeking assistance status. On the contrary, career indecision of students studying at occupational high schools was found to be significantly higher than that of the students studying at general high schools. A possible explanation for this is that the coefficient problem was removed. This may increase students' indecisiveness as students studying at these high schools face more career options.

When decision status is considered, the career indecision of students who were undecided was found to be higher than the decided ones. This finding complies with many other studies which investigated career states. For example, Gati and his colleagues (2011) and Öztemel (2012) found that the career indecision of individuals who were undecided was



higher than the ones who were decided. Similarly, Albion (2000) and Albion and Fogarty (2002) indicate that students who fail to choose a career or a field of study show a higher level of career indecision. Furthermore, Albion and Fogarty (2002) state that indecisiveness can be an aspect of career decision behaviour for students who are at Super's discovery stage or not ready to take over field selection. Therefore, the fact that the level of career indecision of individuals who have not decided on a profession or field of study is higher could be because they over generalize or misinterpret indecisiveness as being a common personality trait. Another possible explanation is that individuals who are not decided on their career may not have sufficient knowledge about either themselves or environmental factors. Some relevant research has shown that those who do not have sufficient knowledge about themselves or their environment experience greater career indecision. Counselors can give information to these individuals to help them reduce their career indecision.

As a result of the multiple regression analysis made with regards to interpreting career indecision, it was found that the contribution of exploratory indecisiveness and state-anxiety was significant while the contribution of impetuous indecisiveness and trait-anxiety was insignificant. This finding partially accords with results of other studies (Campagna & Curtis, 2007; Fuqua et al., 1987; Hardin et al., 2006) which examine the relationships between career indecision and chronic indecisiveness and anxiety. For instance, Campagna and Curtis (2007) found that state-anxiety has more effect on career indecision than trait-anxiety does. This means that counselors can affect an individual's current state (state-anxiety) more than their personality (trait-anxiety); it is easier to reduce state-anxiety than trait-anxiety. Research shows that anxiety causes indecisiveness and that anxious individuals have higher levels of indecisiveness. Therefore, it would be helpful for the individuals who need assistance in overcoming anxiety if their anxiety is controlled and their indecisiveness is examined while a proper intervention is made. The most significant cause of an individual's career indecisiveness is their general indecisiveness. The fact that general indecisiveness, which is assessed as a personality aspect, causes career indecision implies that general indecisiveness should be examined. As general indecisiveness is related to a number of aspects of personality, solving an individual's indecisiveness may make it easier to solve many problems such as, anxiety, dissonant perfectionism, and including career indecision.

Career counseling typically focuses on helping individuals to develop their career decision making skills (Flores et al., 2003). In light of this paper's findings, it appears to be necessary for counselors to develop skills such as stress management for their psychological

counseling and guidance practices. Anxiety can also be reduced by using relaxation techniques and so improve the individual's career decision making process.

This study attempts to determine decision states with a single question which may not be sufficient. This limitation can be overcome by using Marcia's states of identity or the different decision states in Gordon's decisiveness and indecisiveness continuity test (1998) to determine which are the decided and which the undecided individuals. Given the grade levels, not enough 12<sup>th</sup> grade students could be reached. Data were collected in the second term when students are focused on YGS and so unwilling to participate in the study; therefore a sufficient amount of data could not be obtained. In future studies it may be beneficial to repeat the study so as to obtain a sufficient number of samples at all grade levels.

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