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## Original article

# Anxiety for job application among undergraduate students at Faculty of Arts

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**Background:** Arts degrees are questioned of being useless degree for having no specific career path for new graduates. The degrees with no specific jobs combining varies subjects such as art, humanities, and social sciences may cause anxiety during the job search process upon graduation.

**Objective:** To explore the level of anxiety of job application and factors related to anxiety of job application among undergraduate students at the Faculty of Arts at a university in Thailand.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional design was employed with participation of 296 students in the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University. A structured questionnaire was applied to ask about demographic information, anxiety of job application, self-esteem (Thai version of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale), personality traits (Thai version of Big Five Inventory), and coping strategy (Thai version of Coping Strategy).

**Results:** Thirty-five point five percent of students with high anxiety job application were detected. The average score of anxiety of job application was 66.69. High level of anxiety of job application was significantly correlated with medical problems, family financial status, types of careers interests, attitude about current job search situations, lower self-esteem level, higher scores of neuroticism, lower scores of extraversion, lower scores of agreeableness, lower scores of problem-focused strategy, and higher scores of avoidance coping strategy.

**Conclusion:** Students with higher self-esteem, higher scores of extraversion and agreeableness personality, and problem-focused strategy tended to be less anxious of job application. These results therefore suggested the need for an action from related parties proactively increasing students' self-esteem and required skills for dealing with anxiety of job application.

**Keywords:** Anxiety, job application, undergraduate students, Arts students.

Undergraduate students are in the transition period to adulthood after graduation. This period requires an improvement of essential skill such as personal adjustment, so that the students will be able to overcome life's endless challenges and obstacles. As for college students, one of their important goals is to achieve success in their career to prove their capacity which can be related to the quality of the university program.

Having a job is an important factor to become an adult<sup>(1)</sup> as it means taking responsibility of their life by ensuring that they can earn a sustainable living.

However, thinking of job searching can be stressful for the undergraduate students as the current state and the way forward of Thai economy is uncertain. Not only the economic situation, new technologies such as machines and robots will replace human workers causing the lower demand for labor. Apart from that, field of study also plays an important role in job application for the new job seekers. Although a few fields correspond with professions, such as medicine, engineering, and nursing, most liberal arts degrees don't point to specific employment routes.<sup>(2, 3)</sup> According to the study in 2013, most students from arts or humanities degrees are not looking for the job related to their study fields causing the confusion of their career path to pursue. Steven Pearlstein<sup>(4)</sup>, a professor of public affairs at George Mason University, mentioned about the phenomenon where college students were forced not to choose the liberal arts degrees such as English and philosophy because

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the degrees does not lead to a real career in parents' views.

The study of job searching situation among new graduates from Chulalongkorn University in 2004<sup>(1)</sup> shows that a job which does not match their interests, low basic salary offered, and difficulty in finding job search tool are three main obstacles in job application of senior students. In 2006, Ua-ariyapanichkul P.<sup>(1)</sup> shows the results of her study about anxiety and factors associated with anxiety of job application among senior undergraduate students of Chulalongkorn University. Gender, fields of study, capacity of English fluency, computer literacy are related to anxiety of job application. The result shows higher level of anxiety in female and in students studying in fields of humanities and Arts. On the contrary, higher capacity of English fluency and computer literacy are associated with lower level of anxiety.

In order to study more specifically about the anxiety in job application, the researcher is interested in studying the anxiety of job application of the undergraduate students from humanities and arts degrees to explore the level of anxiety and factors related to anxiety of job application from the freshman to the senior. The students from Faculty of Arts are interested by the researcher due to the well-known reputation<sup>(5)</sup> of the faculty for over 100 years. In addition, the ranking of Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University stated in the QS World University Ranking in 2020<sup>(6)</sup> were in the highest position among Universities in Thailand. Furthermore, there are many job opportunities from many recruiting companies such as Adecco, Manpower, and Monroe Consulting opening for the new graduates with Arts degrees, especially the one with the high level of language skills. According to these reasons above, the researcher aims to study if the Arts students are literally anxious of job application as indicated in the previous study and what factors are related to their anxiety.

## Materials and methods

A cross-sectional descriptive research design was used to recruit 296 students from freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior students studying in normal program in 2019 from the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University and willing to participate in this study by giving a consent. In all, 74 students not under 18 years old of the four groups above recruited by stratified sampling method were selected randomly

by simple random sampling method from the first four row of seats in the lecture class before moving to in the next row in case of the refusal to participate the research from the selected subjects. The exclusion criteria were the students who take leave of absence for more than 3 months.

All subjects were invited to provide information by self-reporting using the following questionnaires: 1) a demographic questionnaire; 2) questionnaire about Anxiety of Job application developed by Ua-ariyapanichkul P.<sup>(1)</sup>, the cut-score of the high level of anxiety is over 73 with the overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient equaling to 0.90; 3) Thai version of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale developed by Wongpakaran T, *et al.*<sup>(7)</sup> with the overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient equaling to 0.86, scores lower than 26 indicates the low level of self-esteem; 4) Thai version of the Big Five Inventory (BFI) developed by Banlue K.<sup>(8)</sup> with the overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient equaling to 0.80, average scores higher than 3.6 indicates the high level in each personality trait; and, 5) Thai version of Coping Strategy questionnaire developed by Mansamer P.<sup>(9)</sup> with the overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient equaling to 0.82, average scores of each between 3.5 – 5.0 indicates the high level of using each coping strategy.

## Statistical analysis

The analyses were conducted using the SPSS program version 22.0. Statistical analyses of collected data included descriptive statistics using for describing the characteristics of the sample population such as number, percentage, mean, standard deviation (SD), oddsratio (OD), etc., Chi-square using for testing the correlations among factors related to anxiety of job application, and Pearson correlation coefficients using for the examination of the relationships among all variables. Logistics regression, predictive analysis, was used to predict the relationship between anxiety of job application and factors related to it by using the Forward Likelihood ratio.  $P < 0.05$  was considered as significant difference.

## Results

A total of 296 students were invited to participate in this study in order to examine their anxiety of job application level and the factors such as self-esteem level which is related to it. Seventy-four students from the first to the fourth university year were randomly recruited for the study. The subject's age ranges from

18 to 23. As indicated by self-report, about 20.9% among the subjects had some medical problems such as allergy and Thyroid problems. The average of their monthly salary was 8623.4 baht and most of them came from family with more than 100,000 baht of average monthly income. Of all the subjects, 40.5% were interested in the career such as writer or editor and 25.3% were interested in working in human resources department. Most of them thought that it was not easy to find a job nowadays.

Majority 56.4% of the subjects had moderate level of self-esteem, 25.0% had high level of self-esteem, and remaining 18.6% had low level of self-esteem. About personality traits, half of participants had moderate scores on neuroticism and agreeableness, and 53.7% had moderate scores on extraversion. Concerning the coping strategy used by the subjects, 64.2% had high scores on problem-focused strategy, and 20.9% had high scores on avoidance coping strategy.

Regarding anxiety of job application, 53.0% of the subjects were in the moderate level of anxiety of job application, 35.5% among them were in high level, remaining 11.5% were in low level (Table 1).

The Chi-square examined the correlation between anxiety of job application and factors related to it. The results showed that the level of self-esteem, the attitude about job searching, the scores of neuroticism and extraversion of personality trait, and the scores of avoidance coping strategy were correlated with anxiety of job application ( $P < 0.001$ ). Besides those factors, the results also revealed that having medical problems, the average family monthly income, the job interested by the subjects such as writer, editor, and human resource analyst, the scores of agreeableness of personality trait, and the scores of problem-focused coping strategy were correlated with anxiety of job ( $P < 0.05$ ) (Table 2).

The Pearson's correlation examined the correlation between the scores of anxiety of job application

and the scores of factors related to it. The results showed that self-esteem scores, BFI personality traits scores, and coping strategy scores were correlated with anxiety of job application with statistical significance. Self-esteem, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and problem-focused strategy were negatively correlated with anxiety of job application ( $P < 0.001$ ) Openness to experience was negatively correlated with anxiety of job application ( $P < 0.05$ ) while there is no correlation with statistical significance between social support coping strategy and anxiety of job application. On the contrary, neuroticism and avoidance coping strategy were positively correlated with anxiety of job application ( $P < 0.001$ ) (Table 3).

Logistics regression was used to predict the correlation between anxiety of job application and related factors. The Forward Likelihood ratio was used to control external factors or other variables, resulting that the related factors which can predict the anxiety of job application were attitude of current job search situation, Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Avoidance coping strategy.

According to the analysis, the thought of the subjects that it was not hard to find a job in present days can predict the decrease in anxiety of job application (OR = 0.327,  $P < 0.001$ ) comparing to the subjects who thought that finding a job nowadays were difficult. Comparing to those with lower score in neuroticism, the participants with high score in this trait can predict the increase in anxiety of job application (OR = 2.700,  $P < 0.01$ ). The subjects with the high scores in extraversion can predict the decrease in anxiety of job application (OR = 0.315,  $P < 0.01$ ) comparing to those having lower score in this trait. Comparing to the subjects with lower score in avoidance coping strategy, the subjects with high score in avoidance can predict the increase in anxiety of job application (OR = 4.364,  $P < 0.001$ ) (Table 4).

**Table 1.** The number and percentage related anxiety of job application among subjects.

Anxiety of job application	N	Percentage
<b>Level of anxiety of job application (n = 296)</b>		
Low	34	11.5
Moderate	157	53.0
High	105	35.5
Mean = 66.7 SD = 16.1 (Min = 26, Max = 107)		

**Table 2.** The number and percentage of general information and correlation between related factors and anxiety of job application.

Characteristics	Anxiety of job application				P - value
	Low and moderate		High		
	N	Percentage	N	Percentage	
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	36	18.9	13	12.4	0.337
Female	145	75.9	85	81.0	
Others	10	5.2	7	6.6	
<b>Age (years)</b>					
Not over 20	111	58.1	63	60.0	0.753
21 - 23	80	41.9	42	40.0	
<b>Average monthly salary (Baht)</b>					
<8,000	83	47.2	56	57.2	0.262
8,000 – 10,000	54	30.7	26	26.5	
>10,000	39	22.1	16	16.3	
<b>Medical problems</b>					
Yes	33	17.3	29	27.6	0.036*
No	158	82.7	76	72.4	
<b>Average family monthly income (Baht)</b>					
≤100,000	134	70.2	86	82.7	0.018*
>100,000	57	29.8	18	17.3	
<b>Interested in writer and editor</b>					
Yes	68	35.6	52	49.5	0.020*
No	123	64.4	53	50.5	
<b>Interested in human resource</b>					
Yes	41	21.5	34	32.4	0.039*
No	150	78.5	71	67.6	
<b>Attitude of current job search situation</b>					
Difficult	38	19.9	48	45.7	<0.001*
Moderate	141	73.8	50	47.6	
Easy	12	6.3	7	6.7	
<b>Level of self-esteem</b>					
Low	27	14.2	47	44.8	<0.001*
Moderate	116	60.7	51	48.6	
High	48	25.1	7	6.6	
<b>Neuroticism</b>					
Low and moderate	159	83.2	56	53.3	<0.001*
High	32	16.8	49	46.7	
<b>Extraversion</b>					
Low and moderate	123	64.4	95	90.5	<0.001*
High	68	35.6	10	9.5	
<b>Openness to experience</b>					
Low and moderate	75	39.3	47	44.8	0.358
High	116	60.7	58	55.2	
<b>Agreeableness</b>					
Low and moderate	85	44.5	68	64.8	0.001**
High	106	55.5	37	35.2	
<b>Conscientiousness</b>					
Low and moderate	147	77.0	88	83.8	0.164
High	44	23.0	17	16.2	
<b>Problem-focused strategy</b>					
Low and moderate	59	30.9	47	44.8	0.017**
High	132	69.1	58	55.2	
<b>Social support strategy</b>					
Low and moderate	80	41.9	48	45.7	0.525
High	111	58.1	57	54.3	
<b>Avoidance strategy</b>					
Low and moderate	174	91.1	60	57.1	<0.001*
High	17	8.9	45	42.9	

\* $P < 0.001$ , \*\* $P < 0.05$

**Table 3.** Correlation between the scores of anxiety of job application and related factors tested by Pearson’s correlation.

Variables	Anxiety of job application scores	
	<i>r</i>	<i>P</i> -value
<b>Self-esteem</b>		
Self-esteem	-0.444	<0.001*
<b>Personality traits</b>		
Neuroticism	0.500	<0.001*
Extraversion	-0.259	<0.001*
Openness to experience	-0.124	0.033**
Agreeableness	-0.248	<0.001*
Conscientiousness	-0.271	<0.001*
<b>Coping strategy</b>		
Problem-focused	-0.294	<0.001*
Social support	-0.108	0.064
Avoidance	0.488	<0.001***

\**P*<0.001 (2-tailed), \*\* *P*<0.05 (2-tailed).

**Table 4.** Prediction of the correlation between anxiety of job application and related factors tested by Logistic regression.

Variables	B	SE (B)	<i>P</i> -value	Adjusted OR	95% CI	
					lower	Upper
Attitude of current job search situation	-1.119	0.306	<0.001*	0.327	0.179	0.595
Neuroticism personality trait	0.993	0.326	0.002**	2.700	1.424	5.119
Extraversion personality trait	-1.155	0.394	0.003**	0.315	0.146	0.682
Avoidance coping strategy	1.473	0.361	<0.001*	4.364	2.152	8.851

\**P*<0.001, \*\**P*<0.01

## Discussion

Comparing to the previous study<sup>(1)</sup>, the mean scores of anxiety of job application in this study were a bit higher. Among the subjects, 53.0% were in the moderate level, 35.5% were in the high level, and only 11.5% were in the low level. In this study, the result shows that 35.2% of female students, 26.5% of male students, and 41.2% of other-gender students were in the high level of anxiety of job application. By using Pearson’s correlation, the correlation between anxiety of job application and related factors was found. Self-esteem, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and problem-focused strategy were negatively correlated with anxiety, while neuroticism and avoidance coping strategy were positively correlated with anxiety.

Concerning factors statistical significance related to anxiety of job application examined by Logistic Regression, students who thought that it is hard to find a job currently were more anxious than those who thought it was not hard to find a job nowadays as stated in the previous study of Malakul A.<sup>(10)</sup> that the unemployed status were related statistical

significance to anxiety. In line with the previous study of Uliaszek AA, *et al.*<sup>(11)</sup>, neuroticism and low level of extraversion personality traits were correlated with anxiety. In the current study, avoidance coping strategy was also correlated significantly with the anxiety in concordance with the previous study<sup>(12)</sup> of Gauthier-Duchesne A, *et al.* which the results demonstrated that using of avoidance coping strategy was related to the anxiety and the low self-esteem level.

Apart from the factors examined by Logistic Regression, some factors such as medical problems, average family monthly income, interest of job type, self-esteem, agreeableness personality trait, and problem-focused coping strategy were correlated significantly with anxiety of job application in Chi-Square. In accordance with the previous study<sup>(10)</sup>, medical problems and family financial status were related to anxiety. Also, types of interested job could be the factor related to anxiety as some of job’s opportunities were decreased by many organizations. In line with the study of Alizadeh Z, *et al.*<sup>(13)</sup>, higher score of agreeableness can predict the decrease of anxiety. Regarding the problem-

focused coping strategy, the current study was in conformity with the study of Tuncay T, *et al.*<sup>(14)</sup> indicating that using of problem-focused coping strategy was related to the decrease of anxiety.

As this study was a cross-sectional descriptive study conducting in a university in Bangkok so that it could not generalize to the university in other provinces. Moreover, the subjects recruited for this study were only the students from Faculty of Arts which could not represent the students from others faculties. Furthermore, there might be some other variables which could be correlated with anxiety of job application to study in the future.

### Conclusion

Based on the results of current study, attitude of the current difficult situation to search for the job, avoidance coping strategy, medical problems, family financial status, and the interest in job types such as writer, editor, or human resources were positively correlated with anxiety of job application. On the contrary, self-esteem, extraversion and agreeableness personality traits, problem-focused coping strategy were related to the decrease of anxiety of job application. The suggestion for related parties is to monitor carefully students with the high level in neuroticism, the low level in self-esteem, extraversion, and agreeableness, and the one who often uses the avoidance coping strategy as these groups of students have more risks to develop the anxiety. Another suggestion is to help all students preparing themselves before graduation in order to be ready for their job search process by promoting students' mental health and perform the prevention of anxiety during their job search process such as increasing their self-esteem, their extraversion, their agreeableness, and their problem-focused coping strategy level.

### Conflict of interest

The authors, hereby, declare no conflict of interest.

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