

# The Impact of College Students' Frustration Tolerance on Employment Anxiety: The Mediating Role of Coping Styles

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## ABSTRACT

In order to explore the relationship between frustration tolerance, employment stress and coping styles among university students, and to explore the role of coping styles, this study uses ANOVA, regression analysis and mediation modeling to analyze the data, and applied structural equation modeling to examine the pathways by which coping styles and frustration tolerance affect employment anxiety. Collecting “College Students' Frustration Coping Skills Declarative Scale (CSHDS)” “Employment Anxiety Diagnostic Questionnaire for College Graduates” and “Coping styles questionnaire” from 156 college students, the results are as follows: first, there is a significant correlation between College Students' frustration tolerance, employment anxiety and coping style; secondly, there is a significant negative correlation between college students' frustration tolerance and employment anxiety; last, college students' frustration tolerance will have an impact on employment anxiety by influencing their coping style.

**Keywords:** college students, frustration tolerance; employment anxiety; coping styles

## 1. INTRODUCTION

With the development of society, the number of college graduates in China has been surging in recent years, and the total number of 2021 national ordinary college graduates is about 9.09 million, with an increase of 350,000 year-on-year (China Business Intelligence Network, 2021). Such a severe situation makes the employment anxiety of college graduates unprecedentedly high (CBN, 2017). Anxiety, refers to a complex emotional state that is caused by an inner conflict in emotion or psychology, which in turn triggers irrational feelings of worry or fear ([4]Huang, 2018). For the definition of employment anxiety, according to [5]He et al.(2010), employment anxiety is a negative emotional psychology (e.g., depression, irritability, anxiety, etc.) due to inadequate preparation, which leads to frustration in employment and failure to achieve employment goals and prospects, and therefore also affects their physical, behavioral, and cognitive levels of adverse level reactions. This kind of employment anxiety mainly manifests itself in sense of frustration, confusion about the direction of

employment, and somatic reactions, which have a negative impact on the employment situation and can harm college students physically and mentally ([6]Hong, 2021). Therefore, how to overcome employment anxiety becomes a serious problem for college students.

According to [7]Li (2004), frustration tolerance is an important factor in personality structure, which refers to the size of individual's tolerable and acceptable degree of frustration, that is, people's ability to adapt to frustration, resist and cope with frustration, also called frustration resistance. The university period is a critical stage of life development and an important period of mental growth, and contemporary university students are faced with continuous difficulties in various aspects such as academic pressure, economic pressure, life pressure and emotional pressure. According to [8]Li et al. (2019), in general, college students with strong frustration tolerance are able to deal with defeat rationally and maintain normal behavior. Conversely, college students with weak frustration tolerance have problem analyzing the source of frustration correctly and have difficulty detaching themselves from sense of frustration. In China, there have

been some research works in the field of frustration resistance among college students. There is a significant negative correlation between frustration tolerance and suicidal tendency among college students ([9]Zhang et al., 2016), and a significant correlation between frustration tolerance and the sense of frustration among college students ([10]Li et al., 2020).

There are limited studies related to the relationship between frustration tolerance and employment anxiety. A similar psychological concept, psychological resilience, is mainly discussed by existing studies about employment anxiety. Studies led by [11]Dai (2013) have shown a significant negative relationship between employment anxiety and psychological resilience, which means that the stronger the ability to recover from a negative state during the job selection process, the lower the level of anxiety. Psychological resiliency can effectively enhance the ability of individuals to cope with stress and reduce the psychological distress of individuals when they suffer from stress and setbacks. According to [12]Liu (2014), Friborg's research has shown that individuals with high psychological resilience exhibited higher levels of psychological well-being when faced with the same level of stress. Other scholars have conducted in-depth researches on career choice anxiety as well as psychological resilience and have made attributions for employment anxiety.

Psychological resilience is different from the frustration tolerance. Psychological resiliency refers to the state of the subject's psychological and behavioral response to the changing external environment. This state is dynamic, which changes with the environment and achieves dynamic regulation and adaptation to the environment. Existing literatures give different definitions for psychological resilience and those can be divided into three main orientations: trait ability orientation ([13]Connor & Davidson, 2003), outcome orientation ([14]Masten et al., 1995), and process orientation ([15]Richardson & Neiger, 1990). Although psychological resilience and frustration tolerance have similarities, they only resemble in terms of trait ability orientation and differ in other two orientations. Compared to psychological resilience, frustration tolerance differs in two ways. First, frustration tolerance only focused on the effects of frustration on the mental health. Second, frustration tolerance is more static, which refers to an individual's ability to resist a setback without reacting adversely to it when it occurs. The relationship between psychological resilience and frustration-resistant psychological ability is similar to the relationship between elasticity and friction in physics. Our study on frustration-resistant psychological ability and employment anxiety could complement previous researches.

In addition to frustration tolerance, the coping styles college students respond to frustration is also an

important factor in their ability to overcome frustration and the sense of frustration it causes. According to [16]Zhang and Che (2004), Coping styles are the strategies, methods, and means that people use to cope with the demands of their internal and external environments and relevant emotional distress. According to [17]Peng et al. (2020), frustration tolerance of vocational college students plays a mediating role in the effect of coping styles on sense of frustration. College students' frustration tolerance is closely related to their coping styles, and the two combine to influence college students' sense of frustration. According to [18]Fang and Jia (2015), Coping styles can be understood simply as the methods, means, or strategies that people use to deal with the demands of their internal and external environments and their associated emotional distress. Accurately rating a person's coping style can help us understand the psychological adaptive significance of their behavior under stressful conditions and guide the identification of effective coping styles, the learning of coping skills, mental health education and therapeutic interventions.

According to the current research on frustration tolerance, coping style and employment anxiety of college students, most scholars have discussed college students' achievements and goals from the perspective of academic failure, and linked them with frustration tolerance. Some scholars have conducted in-depth research on career choice anxiety and psychological resilience, and have attributed employment anxiety. However, there is a paucity of research on employment anxiety and frustration tolerance. In addition, in the case of frustration tolerance, research has focused more on general samples and research content, thus no detailed research has been conducted on the possible setbacks encountered by student groups in the employment process and the impact of frustration tolerance on their employment process. Therefore, the employment anxiety and frustration tolerance of college students still have a large research gap to be filled by further research. Between them, [19]YingY and LvW (2012) found that coping style may become a mediating factor. According to [20]Lu (2005), as an important mediator of stress and adaptive capacity, both domestic and international studies have proved that coping style is closely related to individual's frustration tolerance. According to [21]Yu and Wu (2015), positive coping styles can, to some extent, alleviate the negative psychological effects caused by frustration in life, which is conducive to the development of individual psychological health; [22]Hu (2012) also found that poor coping styles may cause negative emotions, thus affecting the physical and mental health of individuals. For this reason, we take the coping styles of college students as an important psychological factor affecting their employment anxiety.

## 2. METHODS

### 2.1. Participants

In this study, 162 questionnaires were collected anonymously through an online platform wjx.cn. After excluding invalid questionnaires, a total of 156 valid questionnaires were analyzed. Among all 156 participants, 35 were junior students and below, 90 were senior students and 31 were postgraduates; 65 were male students and 91 were female students.

### 2.2. Materials

#### 2.2.1. College Students' Frustration Coping Skills Declarative Scale (CSHDS)

Developed by [23]Tian et al. (2014), it has 43 items and uses a five-point scale to assess university students' ability to cope with frustration in four dimensions: optimism and positivity, pursuit of excellence, relationship seeking and regulation and control. Higher scores on each dimension indicate more pronounced individual traits in that dimension. The scale has good reliability, with the total scale having good construct validity ( $\chi^2 / df = 2.80$ , GFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.05), internal consistency Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.88 and retest reliability of 0.74; the alpha coefficients of the four subscales range from 0.75 to 0.79 and the retest reliability range from 0.72 to 0.79.

#### 2.2.2. Employment Anxiety Diagnostic Questionnaire for College Graduates

The questionnaire was developed by [24]Zhang (2005) and consisted of 30 items with 4 dimensions, including 2 lie detector questions. There are four options for each item: very much, somewhat, not too much and not at all. The questionnaire classifies employment anxiety into four categories: "employment fear", which reflects cognitive, behavioral and physical dimensions; "employment anxiety", which reflects emotional anxiety; "job anxiety", which reflects the employed person's speculation and anticipation of what will happen after employment; and "job anxiety", which reflects the employed person's "job anxiety"; and "interview anxiety", which reflects anxiety about the employment process.

#### 2.2.3. Coping styles questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed by [25]Xie (1998) and included two dimensions, positive coping and negative coping, with a total of 20 items. The correlation coefficient for retesting at two-week intervals was 0.89. The total coping style score in this study was based on the formula proposed in the Handbook of Commonly Used Psychological Assessment Scales, edited by Dai:

coping tendency = positive coping standard score (Z score) - negative coping standard score (Z score).

A coping tendency value greater than 0 means that the respondent predominantly uses positive coping in stressful situations, whereas a value less than 0 means that the respondent mainly uses negative coping.

### 2.3. Analysis

In order to explore the relationship between frustration tolerance, employment stress and coping styles among university students, and to explore the role of coping styles, this study uses ANOVA, regression analysis and mediation modeling to analyze the data, and applied structural equation modeling to examine the pathways by which coping styles and frustration tolerance affect employment anxiety. This study predicts that there is a significant negative correlation between college students' employment anxiety and frustration-resilient psychological ability, and a significant positive correlation between coping styles and frustration-resilient psychological ability. Furthermore, this study predicts that frustration resistance psychological ability of university students influences employment anxiety through the mediating factor of coping style.

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1. Correlation between college students' employment anxiety, frustration tolerance and coping style

The correlation of employment anxiety, frustration tolerance and coping style are shown in Table 1, which shows that the frustration tolerance is positively correlated with the coping style, and employment anxiety shows significant correlation with both frustration tolerance and coping style, indicating that the positive coping style has a significant inhibitory effect on employment anxiety.

**Table 1.** The correlation coefficients for each variable

	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Frustration Tolerance	3.4604	0.46599	1		
2. Employment Anxiety	2.5432	0.65331	-.346**	1	
3. Coping Style	2.8611	0.36445	.409**	-.375*	1

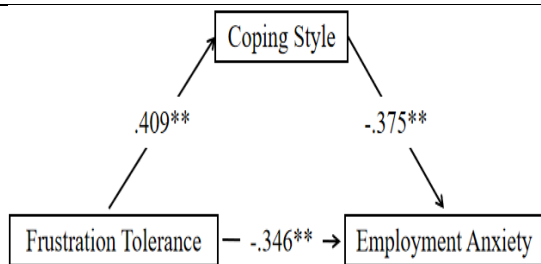
\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

**3.2. The intermediary role of coping methods in the employment anxiety of college students' frustration tolerance**

According to the intermediary effect procedure recommended by Wen and Ye, the intermediary effect between the frustration tolerance and employment anxiety is tested by path analysis, and the results are shown in Table 2. In Equation 1, frustration tolerance has a significant positive predictive effect on coping style. In Equation 2, frustration tolerance has a significant negative predictive effect on employment anxiety, also, the coping style has a significant negative predictive effect on employment anxiety. Combine equation 1 with equation 2, we can see that the coping style plays the intermediary role between frustration tolerance and employment anxiety. The model path map and path coefficient are shown in Figure 1.

**Table 2.** Regression analysis of college students' anti-frustration psychology, employment anxiety and coping styles

	Equation 1 dependent variable Coping Style		Equation 2 dependent variable Employment Anxiety	
	$\beta$	t	$\beta$	t
Independent variable Frustration Tolerance	0.3199	5.6697	-0.231	-2.94
Mediator variable Coping Style			-0.5035	-3.5806
R <sup>2</sup>	0.1673		0.185	
F	32.145		18.059	



**Figure 1.** Intermediary model path map

In order to further test the significance of the intermediary effect, the nonparametric percentpoign Bootstrap method is used for analysis, if 95% confidence interval does not include 0, the intermediary effect is significant, the results are shown in Table 3. It shows that the direct effect between frustration tolerance and

employment anxiety is significant, and the coping style plays an intermediary role between them.

**Table 3.** Bootstrap analysis on the significance of the intermediary effect

effect	route	effect value	95% confidence interval		Relative effect value
			inferior limit	upper limit	
direct effect	Frustration Tolerance → Employment Anxiety	-0.3234	0.5679	0.0753	66.75%
	indirect effect	Frustration Tolerance → Coping Style → Employment Anxiety	-0.1611	0.2995	0.0615
total effect		-0.4845	0.5619	0.079	

**4. ANALYSIS AND SUGGESTIONS**

**4.1. Analysis of the relationship between college students' frustration tolerance and employment anxiety**

Research shows that there is a significant negative correlation between college students' frustration tolerance and employment anxiety. This shows that there may be a causal relationship between college students' frustration tolerance and degree of employment anxiety. Therefore, in order to keep college students healthy mentally and reduce their employment anxiety, it is necessary to cultivate their frustration tolerance, which is a psychological literacy to prevent and eliminate frustration, college students with strong frustration tolerance can bear frustration and the strike it brings

**4.2. Analysis of the intermediary role of college students' coping style**

The research shows that the coping style plays an intermediary role between the frustration tolerance and employment anxiety. This shows that college students'

frustration tolerance will have an impact on employment anxiety by influencing their coping style. If they have strong tolerance resistance, they will take rational and positive coping methods, making it easier to reduce frustration and its negative effects; On the other hand, if they have poor tolerance resistance, they are likely to take negative coping methods such as retreat, self-blame and daydreaming; which is useless to solve the problem, but on the contrary aggravate frustration and its negative effects. This is consistent with results of existing studies. Studies have shown that college students with stronger tolerance resistance will recover faster and develop positive attitude when dealing with setbacks. They are able to measure the impact of frustration in a positive and optimistic way, so as to make correct evaluation and adopt positive coping methods. Adopting positive psychological adjustment mechanism will help improving frustration tolerance, and thus reduce frustration; Positive response can decline negative emotions, that is, the more positive the individual's response, the less negative emotions they will experience.

#### **4.3. Advice on education**

Based on previous analysis, the following suggestions are put forward for the work of mental health education in colleges.

First, strengthen relevant education and cultivate students' frustration tolerance. Colleges should use this as a basis, combine with the introduction of mental health education courses, to increase the content of frustration education. we can use situation simulation to help students understand the significance and way of frustration education by experiencing the influence of frustration tolerance, core literacy and coping style on academic frustration. At the same time, more case teaching methods can be used, through which students can improve their cognition on frustration, thereby improve frustration tolerance.

Second, use active self-defense mechanism and self-regulation mechanism flexibly. Active self-defense mechanism has the function of mental compensation, sublimation and so on. Active self-regulation means college students use their own psychological knowledge and life experience to intervene in psychological distress. It will help eliminate bad emotions and thus maintain mental health development, including improving themselves, adjusting emotions, adjusting mentality, summing up experience, changing perspective, confiding and so on.

#### **4.4. Limitations**

The subjects of this experiment were all college students or graduates, but most of them came from Guangzhou and Hubei, which may lead to slightly less generalization of the results. But Hubei and Guangzhou

are respectively representative inland and coastal cities in China, so the results based on these two cities are still convincing.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This study discusses the impact of college students' frustration tolerance on employment anxiety and how coping styles play an intermediary role in the process. Studies have found that there is a significant negative correlation between college students' frustration tolerance and employment anxiety, and their frustration tolerance will impact employment anxiety by affecting coping styles. College students with strong frustration tolerance are often able to withstand frustration and the blows they bring. Therefore, we suggest that in college, education on facing frustration should be strengthened, also, at the same time, college students should be educated to consciously adjust the self-regulation mechanism of themselves, so as to achieve higher educational goals.

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