

The virtuous cycle of women's job search remodeling and self-efficacy - A case study of the Yangtze River Delta region in China

Shijing Zhu*

University College London (UCL), London, United Kingdom

Email: shijingz200@gmail.com

Abstract. Chinese young career women, who are in their childbearing years, face multiple pressures from work and family. Previous studies have primarily focused on successful cases of women balancing their careers and families, with scant attention paid to the self-efficacy of female job seekers. This study, based on a three-month investigation tracking 67 job seekers in the Yangtze River Delta region of China, used a structural equation model to analyze weekly data. The findings indicate that the proactive engagement of women in job-search reshaping behaviors significantly positively influences their career self-efficacy on a weekly basis. Moreover, weekly career self-efficacy significantly and positively affects employment opportunities and mediates the influence of weekly job-search reshaping on employment opportunities. The research results extend our understanding of the formation of job-seeking self-efficacy and its virtuous cycle effects. They also provide positive suggestions for the self-efficacy of new female job seekers, thereby promoting their job-seeking success.

Keywords:women;self-efficacy;job-search reshaping

1 Introduction

The termination of the COVID-19 pandemic has precipitated a considerable disruption in China's employment market, with women, being a vulnerable demographic in job hunting, experiencing significant implications. The extant employment milieu is volatile and unpredictable. For female job seekers to prevail and achieve success in such a climate, nurturing and enhancing positive psychological resources is crucial.

These positive psychological resources constitute the potent forces conducive to success, encompassing self-efficacy, subjective well-being, hope, optimism, emotional intelligence, and resilience[1,2]. Within the scope of job hunting, self-efficacy is an essential positive psychological resource, reflecting the intrinsic belief in one's capabilities to execute diverse job-seeking activities and fulfill job-seeking objectives[3,4]. The confidence engendered by job-seeking self-efficacy propels novice job seekers to actively participate in job-seeking activities, persisting in their effort to achieve job-seeking objectives even amidst recurrent failures [5,6]. Novice job seekers

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can foster the realization of their job-seeking objectives through the influence of jobseeking self-efficacy[7]. Thus, the cultivation and enhancement of job-seeking selfefficacy continue to be a crucial issue of interest among scholars and practitioners in the job-seeking domain. Job crafting represents an autonomous and proactive behavior, whereby individuals enhance their congruity with the environment by optimizing available resources, current needs, and challenges, thus instigating a reshaping of the job-seeking environment conditions [8]. According to the Social Cognitive Theory, individuals actively partake in environmental shaping[9]. If job crafting facilitates the continual advancement of an individual's job-seeking process and closer proximity to their job-seeking objectives, the individual's job-seeking self-efficacy is ultimately boosted. However, job-seeking self-efficacy fluctuates throughout the job-seeking process, with weekly levels demonstrating variability within individuals [10]. Consequently, this research investigates the influence of job crafting on job-seeking self-efficacy from the perspective of female individuals, theoretically broadening antecedent studies on job-seeking self-efficacy and offering novel practical insights for fostering female job-seeking self-efficacy.

In summary, the overall conceptual framework of this study is illustrated in Figure 1. The reciprocal promotion of job crafting and self-efficacy among female job seekers leads to an accumulation of self-efficacy, thus encouraging female job seekers to amplify employment opportunities and secure positive employment outcomes.

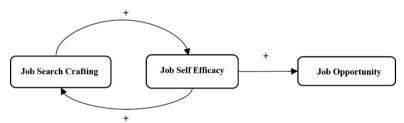


Fig. 1. Research path

2 Literature Review

2.1 Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura's social cognitive theory holds that human activity is the interaction between the three factors of environment, behavior and personal belief, which affects the process of human beings's initiative to shape the outside world[11]. Personal belief is the intrinsic attribute of the individual, and the representative personal belief that people are most familiar with is the sense of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is people's belief in their ability to accomplish a specific behavior or achieve a certain result[12]. As the core concept of social cognitive theory, the formation of self-efficacy comes from the process of individual input and action to shape the environment. In this process, if the results of people shaping the environment through behavior are consistent with the goals they pursue, the sense of self-efficacy of "I can do" will be enhanced; on the

contrary, the sense of self-efficacy will be reduced[13]. Self-efficacy is a psychological driving force that motivates people to constantly act and shape the world. Its level directly affects the initiative and effort of individuals to shape environmental behavior when interacting with the environment. After the formation of the self-efficacy of "I can do", the inner belief of whether the individual can influence the world encourages people to take advantage of various opportunities to constantly invest in behavior, take the initiative to shape the environment, control life and change life. Social cognitive theory also believes that the relationship between people's beliefs and behaviors that shape the world is not only a simple static interaction, but also a cyclical interaction in the time series[14].

2.2 Job Reshaping Theory

The progressively cultivated self-efficacy of female job-seekers influences their engagement in job-seeking reconstructive behaviors. Drawing upon Social Cognitive Theory, self-efficacy, as an intrinsic belief, convinces individuals of their capacity to shape their environment. This perception affects their proactive engagement, level of effort, and evaluation of the outcomes of their behavior in environmental interactions, spurring them to further undertake behaviors that mold their external surroundings[15].

When it comes to job-seeking specifically, higher levels of self-efficacy each week indicate a stronger "I can do it" belief among female job seekers, enhancing their faith in their ability to shape their job-seeking environment. This belief, as an intrinsic psychological drive [16,17], leads female job-seekers to exhibit greater pro-activity and willingness to put forth effort in shaping their environment during interactions with the job-seeking environment[18]. Consequently, they are more willing to engage in job-seeking reconstructive behaviors to shape their job-seeking environment. On the other hand, female job seekers assess the potential of their reconstructive behaviors to shape the job-seeking environment when deciding whether to engage in these behaviors[19]. Job seekers with higher self-efficacy levels tend to give higher evaluations of the potential success of their efforts to shape the environment. Thus, in subsequent interactions with the job-seeking environment, they are more willing to exert effort [20-22]and engage more in job-seeking reconstructive behaviors.

In sum, the enhancement of job-seeking self-efficacy among female job seekers spurs them to invest more in job-seeking reconstructive behaviors. Based on these findings, this study posits the following hypotheses:

H1:The active engagement of female job seekers in reconstructive behaviors has a significant effect on their perception of self-efficacy.

H2:Self-efficacy in job-seeking is positively correlated with job-seeking reconstructive behaviors.

H3:Employment opportunities have a positive relationship with a female job seeker's self-efficacy.

H4:Self-efficacy in job-seeking plays a mediating role that impacts employment opportunities.

In summary, the theoretical model is shown in Figure 2.



Fig. 2. Research model

3 Research design

3.1 Sample and data collection

Convenience sampling is used in this study. A survey was conducted on women in the Yangtze River Delta region of Jiangsu Province, China, and recruited new job seekers in the process of job search as research subjects. The recruitment work follows the principle of voluntariness, promises confidentiality, provides career evaluation and job search guidance, and is paid a certain amount. In the end, 106 female job seekers volunteered to participate. The questionnaire collection is divided into three stages: (1) the initial stage (T0) to measure the demographic variables and general self-efficacy of job seekers (at the end of September). (2) Two weeks after the initial stage, the weekly questionnaire survey of the first stage (T1) will be implemented, and the weekly questionnaire measurement will be carried out in 2 weeks in late October, 4 weeks in November and 4 weeks in December. Active work search will be carried out in October and December, which is a good time to track and investigate the job search of new job seekers in the second half of the year. The weekly questionnaire is filled in by the test subjects using mobile phones on the Internet. The weekly questionnaire includes two parts: the Wednesday questionnaire and the Sunday questionnaire. In order to reduce the burden of answering the questions, each part of the questionnaire takes 1-2 minutes. Wednesday's questionnaire sends a network link to the subjects at 19:00, and reminds the subjects to answer the questions. At 20:00, the author checks the data, and reminds those who do not answer the questions again. The valid questionnaire is limited to before 22:00. Similarly, the Sunday questionnaire sends a link to the subject at 19:00 and reminds the subject to answer the question. At 20:00, the author verifies the data and reminds the unanswered person to answer the question again. The valid questionnaire is limited to before 22:00.(3) The second phase (T2) questionnaire survey is conducted within one month after the end of the first phase of the questionnaire survey, requiring the number of job offers obtained in the process of job evaluation. New job seekers who have completed the three-stage questionnaire test will be paid a certain amount. In the first stage of the 10-week measurement, if the individual is missing more than 3 times, the individual's data will be deleted, the final individual sample size is 67, and the questionnaire recovery rate is 67/100 = 67%. The body sample is N=675(complete $67 \times 10=670$, there are 5 missing values), and the data loss rate is 5/670=0.74%.

3.2 Measurement

3.2.1 Job Reshaping Measurement.

The job search reshaping scale compiled by Hulshofs et al(2020)[23]is used. The scale has a total of 10 items, including resource search, pursuit of challenge, and reduction of obstacles. Each dimension represents "I have invested more job search activities than originally planned" and "In job hunting, I try to reduce psychological tension" as the measurement standards. The scale is scored with 5 points, 1 = completely inconsistent with my situation, and 5 = completely inconsistent with my situation. At 10 different points, the Cronbach'sa coefficient of the scale is from 0.93 to 0.95, the mean M = 0.94, and the standard deviation S D = 0.01. Because the weekly job search reshaping is embedded in the individual, we use MPLUS for a two-level Multilevel Confirmatory Factor Analysis, in which each entry is loaded in its own dimension and three dimensions. Loaded on the job search reshaping concept, the two levels run the same structure of the second-order verification factor analysis at the same time. The results show that the load coefficient of each entry factor ranges from 0.62 to 0.77, reaching the significance level (p<0.01), and the second-order verification factor model is well fitted (X1df=4.37, CF1=0.91, TLI=0.92, RMSEA=0.04, SRMR=0.02).

3.2.2 Self Efficiency Measurement.

The job search self-efficacy scale compiled by Lu et al. (2014) is used. The scale has a total of 3 items, representing items such as "I have the ability to complete this week's work search", the scale uses 5 points to score, 1 = completely different, 5 = completely agree. At 10 points, the Cronbach'sa coefficient of the scale ranges from 0.69 to 0.87, the mean M = 0.67, and the standard deviation SD = 0.03. Although the Cronbach'sa coefficient at one point is 0.69, this value is basically the same as the reliability coefficient results in previous studies. The second-order verification factor analysis shows that the load coefficient of each item factor ranges from 0.49 to 0.60, reaching a significant level (p<0.01), and the second-order verification factor model is well fitted (X/df=1.37, CF1=0.93, TLI=0.98, RMSEA=0.03, SRMR=0.01).

3.2.3 Job Opportunity Measurement.

Using the single-entry measurement method of Hulshof: etc. (2020) [23], one month after the end of the second phase of the questionnaire, individuals are required to evaluate the number of job invitations in the job search process.

3.3 Data analysis

SPSS25.0 is used for descriptive statistical analysis and calculation of the reliability coefficient Cronbach'sa. Use MPLUS7.4 for verification factor analysis and calculate the internal consistent reliability ICC value. The Multilevel Structural Equation Models (MSEM) method is used to build 1-1-1 and 1-1-2 models in MPLUS for indirect effect testing, among which the indirect effect confidence area It is obtained by Preacher's network calculator for Monte Carlo simulation calculation. Since MSEM uses the

Latent Approach to treat the independent variables and result variables of level-1 as latent variables, and the variance is decomposed at two levels, the independent variables and result variables of levl-1 do not need to be centralized, while Hofmann and Ga Vin (1998) according to the centralization strategy, the general self-efficacy and employment opportunities of the variables of level-2 are generally centralized.

4 Result

4.1 Descriptive statistical analysis and related analysis

Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation, correlation coefficient and reliability coefficient of all variables. The job reshaping in the t phase is significantly related to the self-efficacy of the t phase (r=0.44, p<0.01), the job reshaping of the t phase is significantly related to the job reshaping of the t+1 phase (=0.65, p<0.01), the self-efficacy of the t phase Plastic is significantly related (=0.43, p<0.01). Since the variation of individual variables is not separated between individuals and individuals, the correlation between individual variables and individual variables has no reference significance.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Level-2	N=67							
Gender	1.52	0.47						
Age	26.3	4.41	-0.17**					
Education Level	3.07	0.82	0.04	0.10*				
Self-Efficacy	4.23	0.67	0.09*	-0.01	0.23**	(0.76)		
Job opportunity	2.17	0.77	-0.55	-0.23**	-0.02**	(0.77)		
Level-1	N=675							
Job Reshaping(t)	3.18	0.68	-0.03	0.01	0.01	-0.37**	0.44**	(0.91)
Self-Efficacy(t)	2.37	0.78	0.01	0.01	0.02	-0.16**	0.43**	
Job Reshaping(t+1)	3.25	0.67	-0.05	0.00	-0.01	-0.27**	0.65**	
					4			

Table 1. The mean, standard deviation and correlation coefficient of variables

Note: In the gender measurement, "0 = male, 1 = female", the age measurement is calculated in years, and the education level is divided into 5 levels: "0 = junior high school, 1 = high school or technical secondary school, 2 = junior college, 3 = undergraduate, 4 = graduate school". (Within 0 is the reliability coefficient, and the reliability coefficient of the internal variable is the average of 10 point reliability coefficients. * stands for p<0.01, * stands for p<0.05.

Because female job search reshaping and female job search self-efficacy variables are measured horizontally in the individual body, and the general self-efficacy is measured horizontally among women, the second-order verification factor analysis is used to integrate the female body and female individual variables into the model at the same time for verification factor analysis. Considering that there are many items for female job reshaping and general self-efficacy measurement items, the model cannot be recognized. The general self-efficacy measurement items are packaged and

simplified into a measurement model of three entries. Job reshaping packages items according to its three dimensions. The verification factor analysis results are shown in Table 2. The fit effect of the three-factor model and the data is the most ideal, and it is significantly better than the two-factor model and the one-factor model. This shows that the three variables in this study represent different ideas.

RE. X2/df Λ x2 Model Factors X2 df MS CFI TCL SRMR A JSC Three-factor 38.86 33 0.03 0.98 0.89 0.02 JSS 1.16 model **GPS** JSC+J Two-factor 363.1 401.17 11.23 0.02 0.63 0.11 30 0.87 SS model (2)****GPS** JSC+J 1203. One-factor SS+GP 1802.23 32 49.12 822(0.25 0.44 0.44 0.13 model S 1)**

Table 2. Results of verification factor analysis

Note: JSC stands for Job Search Crafting, JSS stands for Job Search Self-efficacy, and GPS stands for General Perceived Self-efficacy. A one-factor model is a single-layer confirmatory factor model that does not consider the hierarchical structure of variables.

4.2 MPLUS constant term model

Referring to the cross-level model analysis step, first build the Intercept Only Model to calculate the proportion of variation between each variable to the total variation (ICC value). As shown in Table 3, job search reshaping (t), job search self-efficacy and job search reshaping (t+) all have significant variation between individuals and individuals. The variation between the three variables accounts for more than 40% of the total variation, which shows that the data structure is suitable for cross-level MPLUS analysis.

Variable	Intercept	In vivo variance	Inter- individual variance	Inter-individual variance accounts for the total variance ICC
JSC(t)	3.12**	0.23**	0.67**	53.4%
JSS(t)	2.27**	0.33**	0.12**	42.1%
JSC(t+1)	3.56**	0.31**	0.34**	56.7%

Table 3. Variation of variables in the level between individuals and in the body

Note: * stands for p<0.01

4.3 Assumption verification

4.3.1.Direct effect.

The MSEM method is used to build a Simultaneous Multilevel Path Model and calculate the path coefficients between variables at the same time. The model results are shown in Table 4. The weekly job search reshaping significantly predicts the weekly

job search self-efficacy (B=0.18, p<0.01) (as shown in table 4, line 4, column 2), assuming that 1 is supported by empirical data; the weekly job search self-efficacy significantly predicts the next week's job search re- <0. 01) (As shown in column 4, line 5 of Table 4), assuming 2 is supported by empirical data; weekly job search self-efficacy significantly predicts employment opportunities (B=0.36, p<0.01) (as shown in table 4, line 5, column 6), assuming 4 is supported by empirical data. The overall multi-horizontal path model is good (X21df=1.56, CF1=0.91, TLI=0.85, RMSEA=0.02, SRMR=0.00)

Variable	JS	S	JS	С	GPS	
v arraute	В	SE	В	SE	В	SE
Level-1						
JSS	0.12**	0.02	0.12**	0.02	-0.12	0.11
JSC			0.33**	0.08	0.28*	0.23
Level2						
Gender	0.10	0.16	-0.01	-0.13	-0.03	0.22
Age	0.03	0.12	-0.02	0.12	0.04	0.02
Education Level	0.09	0.14	-0.04	-0.02	0.02	0.05

Table 4. Results of the overall multi-level path model

Note: represents p<0.01, represents p<0.05. N(Level-1) = 675; N(Level-2) = 67.

4.3.2.Indirect effect.

The test of cross-level intermediary effect requires the use of R software to simulate the confidence interval of indirect effects in Monte Carlo. The Monte Carlo simulation method is used to calculate the confidence interval of the indirect effects of the 1-1-1 model and the 1-1-2 model of this study. The research results are shown in Table 5. The indirect effect of job search reshaping (t) \rightarrow job search self-efficacy (t) \rightarrow job search reshaping (t+1) is 0.02, and the 95% confidence interval is [0.002, 0.046], which does not contain zero value. Therefore, suppose 3 is supported by empirical data. At the same time, the indirect effect of job search reshaping (t) \rightarrow job search self-efficacy (t) \rightarrow employment opportunities is 0.038, and the 95% confidence interval is [0.008, 0.248], which does not contain zero value.

Indirect effect Point estimate 95% confidence interval.

job search reshaping (t) \rightarrow job search self-efficacy (t) \rightarrow job search 0.02 [0.002, 0.046] reshaping (t+1) job search reshaping (t) \rightarrow job search self-efficacy (t) \rightarrow 0.038 [0.008, 0.248] employment opportunities

Table 5. Results of the overall multi-level path model

5 Discussion

First, from the new perspective of women's job search reshaping, explore the precause of positive psychological resources for self-efficacy, and expand the research on how women's job search reshaping affects the weekly job search self-efficacy. On the one hand, the literature has studied the causes of job search self-efficacy from the aspects of job search experience, social support, perceived employability, career exploration, etc., which has laid a good foundation for the study of key influencing factors of job search self-efficacy, but ignores the characteristics of the change of job search self-efficacy. On the other hand, Bandura pointed out that the sense of self-efficacy mainly comes from four aspects: personal mastery experience, alternative experience, verbal persuasion, physiological condition or emotional arousal, but the impact of these factors on self-efficacy is static, and the dynamic related factors on self-efficacy has not been studied. Impact. Similarly, this study makes up for this deficiency, studies the precause of job search self-efficacy from a dynamic perspective, and specifically explores the impact of weekly job search reshaping behavior on job search self-efficacy.

The results show that the reshaping of women's job hunting has a significant positive impact on the self-efficacy of job hunting (B=0.19, p<0.01). This shows that if female job seekers continue to invest in job-seeking behaviors, the self-efficacy of job hunting will increase significantly. The job-seeking remodeling behavior of female job seekers is an important factor in the formation of job-seeking self-efficacy. This study provides a new entry point for an in-depth understanding of job search self-efficacy.

Second, use the "behavior-belief-belief-behavior" circular effect of social cognitive theory to reveal the virtuous circle mechanism of "female job search reshaping women's job search self-efficacy - women's job search opportunities". Some studies have mainly used resources to preserve theory, social cognitive career theory, and selfdetermination theory to study the formation of job search self-efficacy. The question of how to recycle and accumulate the self-efficacy of positive psychological resources for job hunting has not been explored. This study believes that the level of women's selfefficacy in job hunting is the result of a virtuous cycle accumulation under the effect of job hunting reshaping behavior, and is the embodiment of the interaction between women's individual behaviors and beliefs. Based on the theory of social cognition, this study found that weekly job reshaping significantly promotes the improvement of weekly job search self-efficacy (B=0.18, p <0.01). This shows that the job-seeking reshaping behavior of new job seekers will positively affect the self-efficacy of job seekers, which significantly improves this kind of positive psychological resources. At the same time, the self-efficacy of job hunting every week also plays a significant role in promoting the reshaping of job hunting in the next week (B=0.24, p<0.01), indicating that the self-efficacy of job hunting will also in turn promote the investment in reshaping behavior of job hunting. In addition, the results of this study also prove that the self-efficacy of weekly job search has a significant intermediary role between weekly job reshaping and next-week job search reshaping (B=0.04). This fully shows that the self-efficacy of job hunting plays an important intermediary role in the continuous efforts of job-seeking. The continuous investment in job-seeking remodeling behavior leads to the accumulation of a virtuous circle of job-seeking selfefficacy. This result is completely consistent with the prediction of social cognitive theory. The interaction between individual behavior and individual belief is a dynamic relationship, and the continuous efforts of behavior will promote the cyclical accumulation of beliefs.

Third, according to social cognitive theory, the interaction between women's individual behavior and inner beliefs leads to the cyclical accumulation of beliefs, thus increasing the possibility of achieving individual goals. According to this point of view, this study explores whether the accumulation of positive psychological resources caused by the weekly job search reshaping affects the job search results, and reveals the intermediary mechanism of "a woman's job search reshapes a woman's self-efficacy and a job opportunity". In the field of job hunting, especially for new job seekers who are about to enter the unfamiliar job market, will the accumulation of positive psychological resources caused by active behavior help female job seekers shape the external job search environment conditions, thus affecting their employment results? This study explores the question of whether the accumulation of self-efficacy caused by women's job reshaping will affect external employment opportunities. It was found that the positive reshaping of women's job hunting has a significant impact on the weekly job search self-efficacy (B=0.10, p<0.01) On the basis, the weekly job search self-efficacy accumulated by the weekly job search reshaping role will also significantly promote the increase of employment opportunities for new job seekers (B=0.32, p<0.01). The weekly job search self-efficacy has a significant intermediary role between the weekly job search reshaping and employment opportunities (B=0.032). This means that job search reshaping can not only stimulate self-efficacy, but also significantly improve employment opportunities, thus helping female job seekers succeed in job hunting. That is, the intermediary mechanism of "job search reshaping, job search self-efficacy and one employment opportunity" verifies the farend job search results caused by job search reshaping, and strengthens the benign effect of women's positive psychological resources job search self-efficacy.

6 Conclusion

Based on the results and discussions presented above, the conclusions are obtained as below:

First, women's job-seeking reshaping behavior promotes the cultivation of job-seeking self-efficacy. This inspires female job seekers to obtain the positive psychological resources needed in the job search process by taking practical actions to search for work through initiative and initiative, so as to avoid the lack of psychological resources. Second, women's self-efficacy in job hunting can be accumulated in a virtuous cycle under the role of job hunting reshaping behavior. Based on this, female job seekers should realize the importance of taking the initiative to reshape their job hunting in the process of job hunting, take the initiative to cultivate and develop strong positive psychological resources and enhance psychological quality. Third, in view of the self-efficacy stimulated by women's job reshaping can significantly increase employment opportunities and help female job seekers achieve success in job hunting,

female job seekers should take the initiative to shape the job search environment. Through behavioral efforts to obtain an indispensable sense of self-efficacy in the job search process, under the role of the virtuous circle effect of positive psychological resources, female job seekers can obtain more employment opportunities to avoid the lack of psychological resources affecting the realization of job search goals.

Focusing on female job seekers' accumulation of psychological resources to increase employment opportunities through sustained effort, this study originates from the perspective of female job seekers' self-efficacy and explores the formation and virtuous cycle of job-seeking self-efficacy from the viewpoint of Social Cognitive Theory. The findings of the study are as follows:

First, the mediating role of female job seekers' job crafting behavior plays a pivotal role in the formation of job-seeking self-efficacy.

Second, a virtuous cycle exists between female job seekers' job crafting behavior and self-efficacy. This reciprocal relationship aids female job seekers in their active exploration and accumulation of psychological resources.

Last, the job crafting behavior of female job seekers significantly and positively affects their self-efficacy, which can further facilitate female job seekers in achieving successful job attainment.

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