



Job Search Self-Efficacy and the influence of Social Support among University Students

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This study investigated various aspects within the social support system to determine if there was an influence on job search self-efficacy (JSSE) levels of upper year undergraduate university students in Canada. The six social support categories measured were adapted from the Social Provisions Scale (SPS) including: Attachment, Social Integration, Reassurance of Worth, Reliable Alliance, Guidance, and Opportunity for Nurturance. Data were collected from 91 participants who were administered the online survey through email and social media websites. Based on the results observed, Guidance proved to have a strong positive correlation to Attachment and Reliable Alliance. Based on control variables studied, gender proved to have a difference in

females when related to Opportunity for Nurturance, but did not display any relationship in males.

Keywords: job search self-efficacy; social support; social provisions scale; SPS

Introduction

With thousands of young Canadian adults enrolled in upper year university programs, they are eager to search for a potential job before graduating university. This task is quite complex, as several different components can be included that will allow a student to have a successful job search process, and what will determine their level of confidence. Job search self-efficacy is defined as an “individuals’ efficacy expectations regarding their ability to perform important activities associated with career selection and search” (Good, et al., 1994, p. 112).

The purpose of the present study is to examine the role and influence of social support and how it relates to self-efficacy during the job search process. There have been several past studies reporting that family support is proven to support adolescents’ job search self-efficacy. It is crucial to understand that this concept can be applied to the social support system, which is much larger, more comprehensive, and inclusive to support young adults and their self-efficacy when pursuing their job search process. The job search process has become an important and pressing issue as a means to understand the procedure through which individuals seek employment, engage himself or herself, and ultimately obtain employment (Côté, Saks, & Zikic, 2006). The social support constructs used for this study were adapted from Weiss’s model (1974) as cited in Cutrona and Russell (1987), where they elaborated to create the Social

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Provisions Scale (SPS), which include: Attachment, Social Integration, Reassurance of Worth, Reliable Alliance, Guidance, and Opportunity for Nurturance.

The model originally constructed by Weiss (1974) links to our present study as it is stated, “if the knowledge that one is supported by others increases self-efficacy, then effective coping may be one important consequence of social support” (Cutrona & Russell, 1987, p.39). As cited by Cutrona and Russell (1987), Bandura (1977, 1982) provided valuable evidence that self-efficacy beliefs are predictive of actual coping behaviours. Additionally, it has been previously cited by Bandura (1977, 1982) that the individual whose self-efficacy is reinforced through the input of supportive groups of others would be expected to cope more effectively and suffer fewer effects of stress, than those support systems that does not provide such reinforcement (Cutrona & Russell, 1987).

The Career Search Self-Efficacy (CSSE) model has provided an important construct for the study of career development, and is of significant importance to young adults as they enter the stage of exploring their options for future jobs. Furthermore, this study documents information that can be provided to further enhance the social support system, whereby university professionals can utilize this information to provide accurate, and truly useful support to young adults embarking on their job search process. This study will aim to build upon past research to encompass the social support system, and how it relates to job search self-efficacy; past research has been widely studied by Ashforth & Saks (1999), in addition to Nota, Ferrari, Scott, & Soresi (2007).

Literature Review

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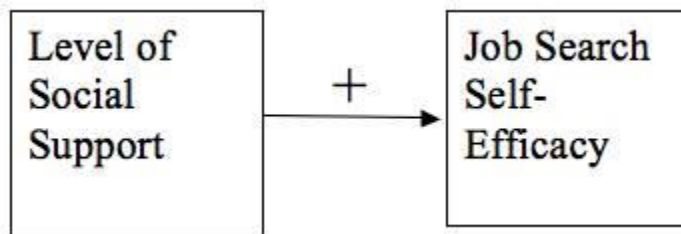
As university students near graduation, they typically seek employment, which will allow them to apply the skills and knowledge which they acquired during their post-secondary studies (Renn, Steinbauer, Taylor, & Detwiler, 2014). However, not every undergraduate student possesses the same degree of confidence in their ability to find work, which influences their overall self-efficacy. Bandura (1994) defined self-efficacy as people's beliefs in their ability to influence events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy is influenced by four major factors including; mastery experiences, physical strength and stamina, social modelling and social persuasion (Bandura, 1994). For the purpose of this research study, we will be focusing on the social dimensions of self-efficacy. Past research tells us that "virtually all the major career choice and developmental theories acknowledge to varying extents the role of the family in the career development of late adolescents and young adults" (Blustein, p. 39, 1991). Although past research focuses on adolescent self-efficacy, which is mainly supported through the family system, our study aims to focus on young adults that have a more complex and independent social system, including but also beyond the family (Blustein, 1991).

~~The goal of this study is to determine if social support has a positive influence on a university student's job search self-efficacy. Contributions of this study will provide a valuable platform for future research extending towards extrinsic factors influencing job search self-efficacy, rather than personal characteristics. It will also provides students with knowledge of the impact of social influence on job search self-efficacy; as well as document information that can be provided to interested parties to enhance levels of social support within university.~~

This model visually describes a positive relationship between the level of social support and job search self-efficacy. For example, staying true to this model, a higher level of social support

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would indicate a higher level of job search self-efficacy. Additionally, when social support levels are high for men and women their job search self-efficacy will be high but vary by the gender differences. Finally, a student's cumulative grade point average is not directly reflected by level of support or self-efficacy but is influenced depending on the social provision.



Job search self-efficacy

Job search efficacy can be defined as an individual's efficacy expectations regarding their ability to perform important activities associated with career selection and search (Good et al., 1994, p. 112). Job search self-efficacy is important because it influences the type of careers undergraduate students will enter into. It also influences the level of confidence one possesses in their work performance. Bandura, (1982, p. 123) stated that, "self-efficacy determines how much effort people will expend, and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles or aversive experiences." While multiple factors influence job search self-efficacy, such as educational advancement, family support, and social environment this study focuses on past research that has examined the influence of social support, gender differences, and Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) because they are most related to University students. These factors were examined closely in past research and were proven to be increasingly vital to adequately assess job search self-efficacy among young adults. Several studies included a section dedicated towards direction for future research in which most

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expressed the importance of assessing gender results separately as men and women differentiate in their job search self efficacy.

Performance accomplishments reflect an individual's development within their career. "The higher the level of self-efficacy, the higher the performance accomplishments"(Bandura, 1982, p. 122,). Individuals that have higher self-efficacy tend to perform better at work because of their expended effort and persistence when given a challenging task. Higher levels of performance may lead to greater opportunities and recognition, further enhancing an individual's job self-efficacy.

Social Support

Social support is defined as "information leading the subject to believe that he or she is cared for and loved, esteemed, and a member of a network of mutual obligations" (Cobb, p. 300, 1976). It helps individuals develop a strong sense of self-efficacy by raising levels of self-confidence, and providing a coping mechanism during times of stress (Dahlem, Zimet & Walker, 1991). Social support can encompass many different media, one of which is family. According to Brown, Ryan and Solberg (1996, p. xxx), "Family is believed to play a central role in the development of career search self-efficacy when it creates an atmosphere that encourages active exploration of one's environment and thereby offers support and opportunity for mastery experiences that are important antecedents to developing strong self-efficacy expectations". A strong social support system creates a foundation for high self-efficacy as "seeing similar others perform successfully can raise efficacy expectations in observers, who then judge that they too possess the capabilities to master comparable activities" (Bandura, p. 126, 1982).

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Career support predicts college student career planning, job search intentions, and self-defeating job search behavior via student career self-efficacy (Renn, Steinbauer, Taylor, & Detwiler, p. 422, 2014). It can be found in mentors, family, peers, etc. when students are planning a career search they benefit from having a mentor but when the student behaved in a self-defeating way a mentor negatively related (Renn, Steinbauer, Taylor & Detwiler, 2014). "Family support is believed to play a central role in the development of career search self-efficacy...and thereby offers support and opportunity for mastery experiences that are important antecedents to developing strong self-efficacy expectations" (Brown, Ryan, & Solberg, 1996.)

Emphasis on Gender Differences

Throughout past research, it was concluded that men and women should be assessed separately as there is gender difference in terms of family support and their commitment to career choices, including career search self-efficacy (Blustein, 1991). In a previous study using a sample of 253 Italian youth, the study found that, for male adolescents attending a university-preparation high school, career search self-efficacy partially mediated the relationship between family support and career indecision (Nota, Ferrari, Scott, & Soresi, p.2, 2007). It has also been determined that men's attachment to their mothers was found to be a predictor of CSES scores in career search self-efficacy (Brown, Ryan, & Solberg, 1996). While, in females, it was both a combination of family dysfunction as well as attachment to mother which significantly impacted career search self-efficacy (Brown, Ryan, & Solberg, 1996). A well-known description for why males and females should be assessed separately is as follows, "males perceive themselves to be more efficacious for traditionally male and female vocations.

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Whereas women judge themselves highly efficacious for occupations traditionally held by women, but inefficacious in mastering the educational requirements of vocations dominated by men" (Bandura, p.137, 1982).

Emphasis on Grade Point Average

A high grade point average is not necessarily always indicative of future success. Research has found that, "Students with low grade averages need not be discouraged that their job search efforts will be less successful than their peers with higher grades" (Ashforth & Saks, 1999, p.347). Although the results do indicate that grade average related to finding employment, the results also indicated that job search self-efficacy and perceived control as well as job search behaviors were stronger predictors of employment success" (Ashforth & Saks, 1999, p.347).

Model

Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

A study by Blustein (1991) encompassed the idea that support, in its entirety, does in fact contribute to career outcomes, which includes the career search process that is connected to job search self-efficacy. This hypothesis was also created in connection with a study which

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concluded that career support given by a working professional mentor was found to be positively related to student career self-efficacy (Renn, Steinbauer, Taylor, & Detwiler, 2014). Family support is also considered to be a form of social support and past research by Brown, Ryan, & Solberg suggests that the family plays a huge role in terms of support which was found to influence job search self-efficacy (Brown, Ryan, & Solberg, 1996). Based on this evidence, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1: The degree of social support in one's life is positively correlated to one's job search self-efficacy.

A student with a high CGPA can be assumed to possess a high level of intelligence and the drive to complete university with an impressive grade result. It would be a natural thought process that those who achieve great results academically would experience confidence towards the job search process, due to their abilities and past achievements. A study by Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons (2010) concluded that those nearing graduation who have achieved a higher GPA possess a greater knowledge of their preferred career path. The link can be made between having a preferred career path and one's job search self-efficacy. Based on this evidence, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2: A student's CGPA (cumulative grade point average) is positively correlated to their job search self-efficacy.

Social attachment, including parental attachment affects the way one develops their self-efficacy which contributes to job search self-efficacy. A study by Blustein, Walbrige,

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Friedlander, & Palladino (1991) supported this hypothesis by suggesting that females who have a moderate degree of attachment to both their parents while also experiencing conflicted independence from their parents are more committed to their career choices. Whereas a male's relationship with his father is far more influential in terms of his career aspirations than that with his mother. In addition, males who have greater attitudinal independence from their fathers tend to be less committed in the job search process (Blustein, Walbridge, Friedlander, & Palladino, 1991). Irrespective of ~~to~~ gender, the fact that remains is that social attachment has an effect and/or influence on job search self-efficacy. Based on this evidence, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3: The level of social attachment one experiences is positively correlated to one's job search self-efficacy.

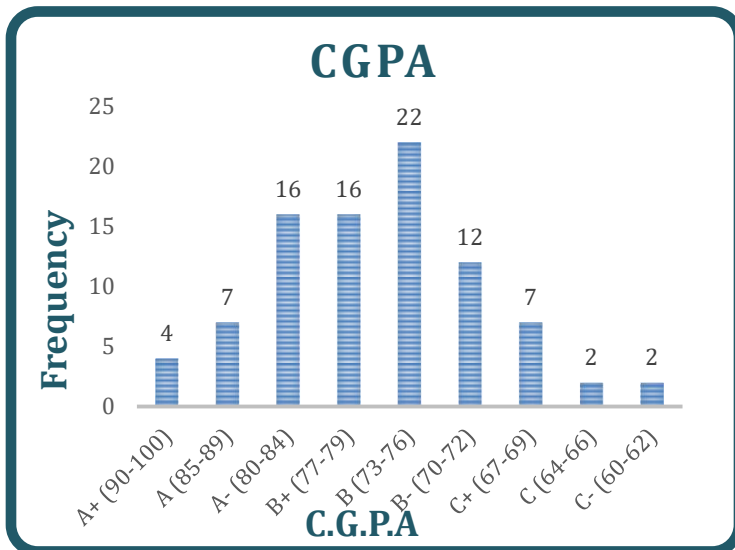
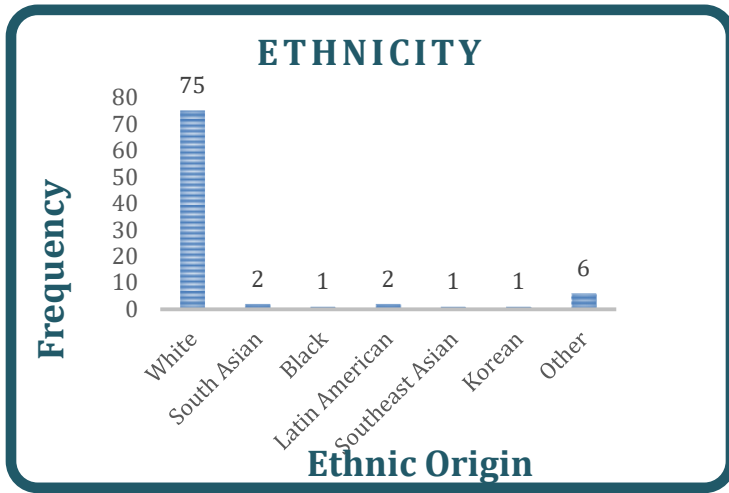
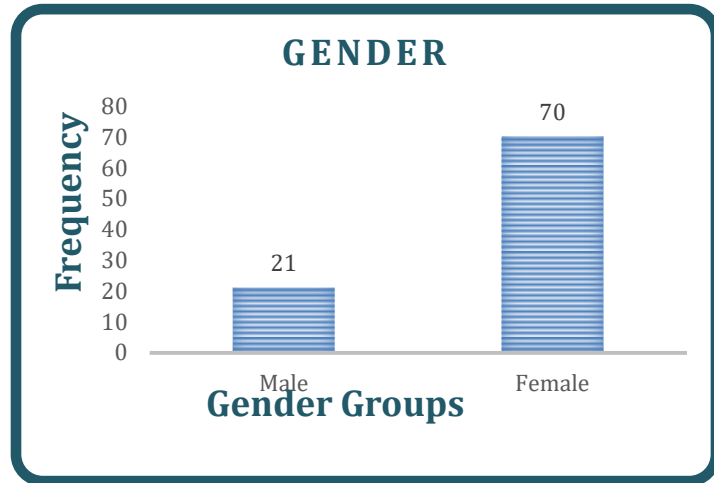
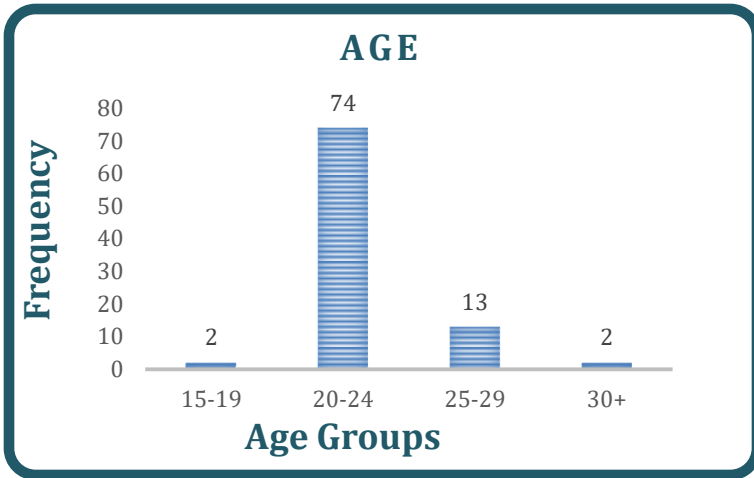
Methodology

Participants

The study was conducted using third and fourth year University students. Information was collected on four dimensions to determine the respondents demographic profiles.

Participants were asked to provide their Gender, Age, Ethnicity and Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA). A total of 91 students completed the study. Of the 91 respondents, 70 (76.9%) were female and 21 were male. The most common age was 20-24 years of age with 81.3% respondents in this category. 75% of respondents identified as a White ethnicity, and the most common CGPA level was a B (73-76%) with 24.2% of respondents.

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Measures

Social Support. The Social Provisions Scale was used to determine the perceived level of social support among respondents. The Social Provisions scale, “measures the degree of perceived availability of social support using a five-point scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)” (Nota, Ferrari, Scott, Solberg, & Soresi, p. 181, 2007). The Social Provisions Scale measures six different components. These components are; Attachment, Social Integration, Assurance of Worth, Reliable Alliance, Guidance, Opportunity for Nurturance, and Job Search Self-Efficacy.

Job Search Self-Efficacy. The Career Search Self-Efficacy Scale was used to determine the perceived level of confidence in job search behaviors. The Career Search Self-Efficacy scale “assesses the degree of perceived confidence to successfully perform various career-search activities. Items beginning with the phrase “How confident are you in your ability to:” were rated on a 10-point scale ranging from 0 (very little) to 9 (very much)” (Nota, Ferrari, Scott, Solberg, & Soresi, p. 181, 2007).

Procedure & Data Analysis

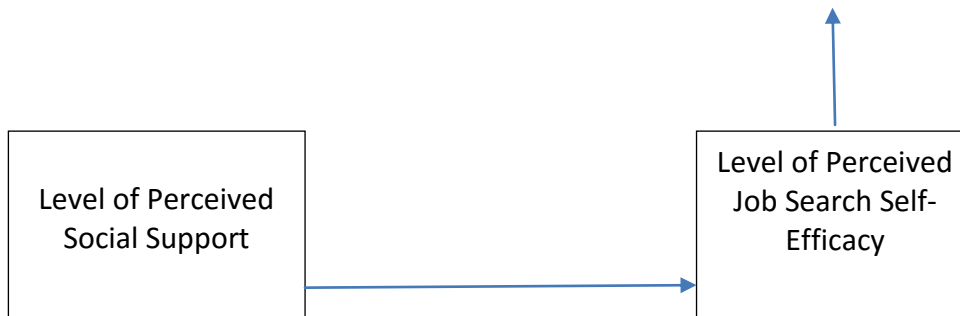
Students completed an online questionnaire consisting of 38 questions, and received an invitation to view the online interpretations and suggestions. The study involved determining if the level of perceived social support positively correlated with the level of perceived job search self-efficacy. The dimensions of the Social Provisions Scale and the Career Search Self-Efficacy

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Scale were measured against the demographic information provided by respondents to determine the relationship between these variables.

Model

This model was created to determine whether there is a direct positive correlation between the level of perceived social support and the level of perceived job search self-efficacy.



Results

The focus of this study was to analyze the influence of social support on job search self-efficacy among University students. Although past research focused on adolescence and family support, this study uses a more complex support system encompassing not only family but also other aspects of the social system.

Correlations

	Gender	CGPA	Attach.	S.I	R. of W	R.A.	Guidance	O. for N.
Gender								
CGPA	0.051							

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Attachment	0.032	-0.311**						
Social Integration	0.105	-0.03	0.612**					
Reassurance of Worth	0.172	-0.191	0.550**	0.691**				
Reliable Alliance	0.053	-0.198	0.701**	0.513**	0.462**			
Guidance	0.004	-0.202	0.813**	0.649**	0.608**	0.787**		
Opportunity for Nurturance	0.301**	-0.028	0.257*	0.308**	0.441**	0.167	0.258*	
JSSE	-0.029	-0.03	0.446**	0.426**	0.482**	0.316**	0.407**	0.199

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

This study tested proposed relationships by looking at the correlation among study variables in a social system. Within this social system, five control variables were questioned against six social components while mapping each against itself as well. Within the control variables, there were significant findings in that majority (70) females were the respondents as oppose to (21) males. Since the gender of the respondents varied significantly, it was expected to see a gender difference throughout the research, but found that males and females only differ in their opportunity to nurture. For example, in questions such as Q5.4. "There are people who depend on me for help", females generally selected strongly agree where males tended to select more toward strongly disagree. The five social provisions examined were Attachment (Attach.), Social Integration (S.I.), Reassurance of Worth (R. of W.), Reliable Alliance (R.A.), Guidance, and Opportunity for Nurturance (O. for N.). There were two very significant results to this research that related to the social provisions of Attachment, Guidance, and Reliable Alliance. The largest correlation (r) existed between variables attachment and guidance at $r = 0.813$, meaning that

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when attachment increases, guidance increases. Guidance is then 66% explained by attachment or vice versa. Guidance again is significant in correlation to reliable alliance at $r = 0.787$, meaning that reliable alliance is 62% explained by guidance or vice versa. All of the social provisions positively correlated to job search self-efficacy, each with its only strength in relationship. The only finding of social provision that was positive but not significant was opportunity for nurturance. The social provision of attachment resulted in the highest significant correlation of $r = 0.446$, meaning that about 20% of job search self-efficacy can be explained by a student's attachment. One of the most interesting results that was found was that there was no relationship between a student's cumulative grade point average (CGPA) and their job search self-efficacy. Another interestingly significant result found was that the social component of attachment is negatively correlated to CGPA. This result indicated that people who answered more strongly disagree to questions such as Q5.17. "I feel a strong emotional bond with at least one other person" had a higher CGPA. Job search self-efficacy was proved to not be influenced by one provision of the social system but is formed by all the components working together varying in correlation strength.

Discussion

Hypothesis 1 Result

The degree of social support in one's life is positively correlated to one's job search self-efficacy.

As expected, the results of the study showed that the degree of social support in one's life is positively correlated to one's job search self-efficacy. The study measured six different aspects of social provisions which each had a significantly positive correlation to job search self-efficacy. The reasoning behind this is that the support an individual experiences gives them the

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perception and feeling that they are cared for and guided by others, and that they are part of supportive relationships. This leads to individuals putting forth a greater effort when pursuing a job search. Had there been a negative correlation, it would show that higher levels of social support would lead to lower levels of job search self-efficacy. One explanation could be that students who receive such large amounts of social support may be led to the belief that their social system will be there regardless of their efforts causing them to put forth less effort in their job search.

Hypothesis 2 Result

A student's CGPA (cumulative grade point average) is not correlated to their job search self-efficacy.

Contrary to the initial hypothesis that CGPA would be positively correlated to one's job search self-efficacy, there was found to be no positive correlation between the two. The results did not show a significant negative correlation between these two factors either. This leads to the conclusion that there is no significant relationship with the cumulative grade point average of a University student and their job search self-efficacy. According to Ashforth and Saks (1999), this conclusion was found as well in that students with low CGPA need not be discouraged in that when searching for a job their efforts would be less successful than students with higher CGPA but that perceived control over a job search indicated success more than CGPA. The first possible explanation for this could be that intelligence does not necessarily have to do with the degree of effort an individual puts forth when searching for a job. Another possible explanation could be that University students that were sampled having high CGPA and are in their third and fourth year might not be interested in job search at this point as they may

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want to continue in academics in the upcoming years. An individual's interest in job search has an impact on their job search self-efficacy as the amount of effort they put into searching for a job would be low. Had there been a positive correlation between CGPA and job search self-efficacy as predicted, a plausible explanation could be that the higher an individual's CGPA is, the more entitlement they would feel when searching for a job.

Hypothesis 3 Result

The level of social attachment one experiences is positively correlated to one's job search self-efficacy.

As expected, results of the study showed that the level of social attachment one experiences is positively correlated to one's job search self-efficacy. Attachment was measured by level of close relationships, emotional security and well-being, and intimacy. Individuals that showed high levels of these factors are more likely to demonstrate a higher level of job search self-efficacy. This could be explained through the idea that attachment is essentially the security that an individual feels within their social group and the more attached or secure they feel the more likely their confidence will be higher. Thus allowing their self-efficacy when searching for jobs to be higher especially if they know that those whom they are attached to will provide them with the social support required in order to carry out the activities of searching for jobs in a confident way.

The Social Provisions Scale measured five other components of social provisions including: social integration, reassurance of worth, reliable reliance, guidance, and opportunity for nurturance. Each of these components showed a significantly positive correlation to job search self-efficacy meaning that the higher the level of a component, the higher level ones job

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search self-efficacy or vice versa. Social integration is a measure of enjoyment in social activities, and sharing beliefs with others. Reassurance of worth is measured by recognition of abilities and skills by others, and perceived competence in the view of others. Reliable alliance is the dependence degree in other people, and how much assistance one gets when in trouble. Guidance is seen is mainly times of stress and is measured by the people available for someone to talk to when needed, and the comfort level in the people you turn to under stress. The fifth provision opportunity for nurturance is measured by other dependence on you, and feelings of responsibility for others.

Limitations and Direction for Future Research

As previously mentioned, the main objective of the research conducted was to determine whether social support had an influence on the level of self-efficacy within university students during the job search process. After conducting the study it was apparent that there were several limitations, which could be improved on for future research. One major limitation that affected the significance of our study was the number of participants we recruited for the study. While there were several limitations that required us to not contact other courses in which we were enrolled, this meant we largely were responsible for recruiting respondents within our own social circles. With each group member having varying sizes of social circles, this can greatly affect the number of respondents recruited. If we had a larger sample size of participants, this could have allowed us to depict a more representative sample of the population in which we were observing.

Furthermore, while number of participants was a significant issue, we also had anticipated a greater variety of participants. As previously mentioned, our study consisted

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mainly of females (70 respondents), and of the total 91 respondents, 75 were of white ethnicity. Had there been more ethnic diversity within our study, this could have impacted several social provisions, as many cultures may experience support in several ways. Moreover, with a higher number of female respondents, this could have impacted several of the social provision measures, as females tend to have a higher need for opportunity of nurturance, and other factors more so than males.

Another limitation to our research study was the time allotted to create and collect data. While this research study was conducted over a four-month period (from September to December), the time that was provided for data collection could have extended to a longer period, which may have impacted the number of respondents we could have recruited.

A fourth limitation that was found when conducting preliminary past research was the ability to find accurate tools to measure and investigate the topic of interest. While the tools we found (CSSE and SPS) were of significant value, previous research had not combined the use of these tools in conjunction with each other, making it more difficult to interpret and compare. Many past tools observed focused on self-efficacy unrelated to job search, or focused on the family as a sole support system for self-efficacy.

Based on the limitations observed from the study, the results of the research revealed that there could be opportunities for future research. Prior to this study, past research was mainly focused on adolescents, or adults that had previously been employed and were laid off causing them to re-enter the job search process with already lower levels of self-efficacy. In further research, a team could focus on a specific construct, which relates to self-efficacy, such as individual motivation or satisfaction and how social support influences these factors. Lastly,

future research should encompass a larger, and more representative sample size would allow for a larger picture to be analyzed bringing further insight to the tools and topic studied.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the goal of this study was to determine if social support had an influence on a university student's job search self-efficacy and if so, was it positive or negative. Past research has focused heavily on the role of one's family in terms of influencing job search self-efficacy. This study focuses primarily on social support as a whole, including and going beyond the family. It was hypothesized that the degree of social support, a high CGPA, and the level of social attachment would all be positively correlated with job search efficacy. However, only the degree of social support and level of social attachment hypotheses proved true as there was no correlation found between a student's CGPA and their job search self-efficacy, within this study. Therefore, it was determined that social support does in fact influence one's job search self-efficacy. As this study did have limitations, such as a smaller group of participants, it does hope to contribute a valuable platform for future research extending towards extrinsic factors influencing job search self-efficacy, rather than personal characteristics. This is valuable information for several different people within one's social surroundings, including but not limited to, young people, families, educators, employers, and students themselves. Young people, including students, would be assumed to feel more at ease to know that a high CGPA is not necessarily correlated with job search success and career success as a whole. This would take off some of the relentless pressure placed on received high grades in post secondary

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programs. Families can use these results to understand how levels of attachment and guidance influence, benefit, and hinder a child's progress while progressing into the workforce. As for educators, the facts they present their students with should be accurate and up to date. For instance, they can be perceived as a type of social support for certain students and impact their career path choices including their job search self efficacy. Employers should be aware of these findings, but most importantly the results of CGPA not being correlated and not necessarily being an indicator of performance while in the workforce. This may allow for employers to rely less heavily on a student's post secondary CGPA and transcript information during the recruitment and hiring process and focus more energy towards different factors which are indicative of accurately measuring performance. Lastly, it would be beneficial for students and those who provide support in a social setting to understand the influence one's social surroundings have on their career path, starting with their job search self-efficacy.

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