

## Psychosocial Dimensions of Career Anxiety: Examining Self-Efficacy, Family Environment, Locus of Control, and Ambiguity Tolerance Among Indian Adolescents

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### **Abstract**

*Career anxiety has emerged as a significant concern among adolescents navigating the complexities of educational transitions and career decision-making in contemporary India. This study explores the psychosocial dimensions of career anxiety by examining its association with career decision self-efficacy (CDSE), family environment (FE), locus of control (LOC), and career decision ambiguity tolerance (CDAT). The research aims to identify the extent to which these psychosocial factors contribute to the experience of career anxiety among Indian adolescents. Rooted in theoretical frameworks of cognitive appraisal, social learning, and personality psychology, this study adopts a multidimensional approach to career anxiety. A sample of 977 students from grades X and XII in Jaipur, Rajasthan, was surveyed using standardized instruments assessing the constructs of CA, CDSE, LOC, CDAT, and FE. The findings reveal a complex interplay between internal personal beliefs and external environmental influences. Higher levels of self-efficacy and ambiguity tolerance were associated with lower levels of career anxiety. At the same time, external locus of control and unsupportive family environments were positively correlated with heightened anxiety. This research also emphasizes the cultural and contextual influences shaping adolescents' psychological experiences—socio-cultural expectations, academic pressures, and evolving occupational landscapes further compound career-related stress. The study underscores the significance of a supportive family environment and a strong sense of personal agency in mitigating anxiety. In conclusion, the findings highlight the necessity of adopting a holistic and culturally sensitive framework to understand career anxiety. Interventions aimed at strengthening self-efficacy, fostering open family communication, and developing tolerance for ambiguity can be instrumental in promoting psychological well-being and informed career decision-making among adolescents.*

### **Keywords:**

*Career Anxiety, Career Decision Self-Efficacy, Locus of Control, Family Environment, Ambiguity Tolerance, Indian Adolescents, Psychosocial Factors.*

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## **Introduction**

Adolescence, the transitional phase between childhood and adulthood, is marked by rapid physical, emotional, and cognitive changes. This period is crucial for identity formation and career decision-making. Amidst emotional fluctuations and societal expectations, adolescents often experience career anxiety as they attempt to align personal abilities with career aspirations. Parental expectations, peer influence, school environment, and media play a significant role in shaping these decisions, with parents exerting a particularly strong impact. The pressure to meet familial aspirations can intensify anxiety, making it essential to explore how various psychosocial factors—such as self-efficacy, family environment, locus of control, and ambiguity tolerance—affect career-related stress among adolescents.

## **Career**

The term “career” refers to the comprehensive journey of an individual through life, particularly focusing on the progression of roles, responsibilities, and experiences in both personal and professional contexts. It is not limited merely to a sequence of jobs or designations but encompasses a broader spectrum of one’s engagements—paid or unpaid—including professional employment, community service, family duties, and personal endeavors.

A career is shaped over time through a combination of decisions, activities, and opportunities that reflect an individual’s interests, skills, values, and aspirations. In the context of adolescence, career decision-making becomes a pivotal aspect of development, deeply influencing future satisfaction, identity formation, and societal contribution. Therefore, it is essential to adopt a holistic understanding of career, considering even small educational or interpersonal decisions that may significantly shape one’s future path.

Careers are multifaceted. On one hand, the term may denote a person’s occupation or profession—such as a teacher, lawyer, doctor, engineer, artist, or electrician—requiring varied levels of education and expertise. On the other hand, it also implies long-term progression, personal growth, and achievements acquired through sustained efforts in a particular direction over a significant period of life. Career decisions are often influenced by key factors such as:

1. Personal Interests
2. Individual Abilities and Skills
3. Desire to Contribute to Society

Making informed and reflective choices based on these factors is vital for ensuring personal fulfillment and effective career development.

## Factors Influencing Career Choice

Career decision-making is a complex and multidimensional process shaped by a multitude of interrelated factors. These include job-specific requirements such as requisite training and expertise, potential financial rewards, and individual preferences. These factors do not operate in isolation but are significantly influenced by broader personal, societal, and cultural elements. Analyzing these diverse influences in conjunction with established career development theories offers valuable insights into the underlying motivations and decision-making mechanisms involved in choosing a career path.

Career development theories serve as foundational frameworks for understanding how and why individuals make particular occupational choices. They elucidate the psychological, social, and behavioral dimensions of career planning. In the context of emerging disciplines such as neuroscience, new avenues for understanding career development are continually unfolding. A review of existing literature suggests that no single theory can comprehensively address all aspects of career decision-making. Instead, these theories tend to illuminate specific facets of the process, indicating the value of a multidimensional perspective.

By examining the interplay of various influencing factors through multiple theoretical lenses, individuals are better positioned to make career choices that align with their values, goals, and personal circumstances.

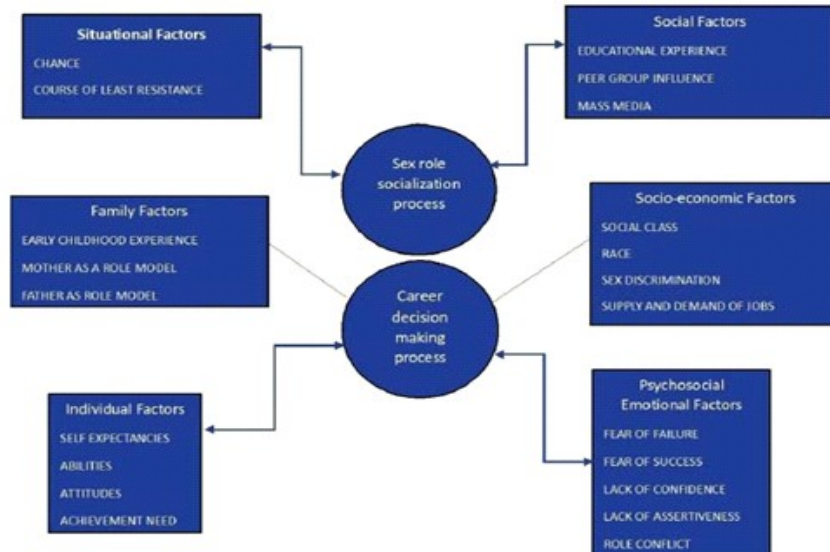


Figure 2: Career Decision-Making Process

The following key factors play an integral role in shaping an individual's career choices:

### **1. Childhood Fantasies**

Early childhood dreams and imaginative play often serve as the foundation for later career aspirations. These initial conceptions of adult life influence perceptions of desirable careers. Ginzberg's Career Development Theory highlights the relevance of these early stages in shaping future vocational decisions.

### **2. Culture**

Cultural background—including ethnic identity, community values, and regional traditions—plays a critical role in career choice. Cultural norms shape beliefs regarding acceptable occupations and professional success. Multicultural career counseling addresses the necessity of incorporating cultural context when guiding individuals through career planning.

### **3. Gender**

Gender remains a significant determinant in the career decision-making process. Societal expectations and gender-based stereotypes can restrict perceived career options. Theories such as Social Learning Theory and frameworks used in multicultural counseling explore how gender norms influence occupational interests, access, and success.

### **4. Interests**

According to Holland's Career Typology, individuals are more likely to succeed and feel satisfied in occupations that match their personality types. This model, known as the Holland Codes, identifies six personality/career types and aligns them with occupational environments, enabling individuals to select careers that resonate with their intrinsic interests.

### **5. Life Roles**

Individuals often juggle multiple roles throughout their lifespan—such as student, parent, or employee—which evolve over time. Super's Lifespan, Life-Space Theory emphasizes the significance of these roles and their shifting impact on vocational decisions throughout different life stages.

### **6. Personality Type**

Understanding one's personality traits offers several advantages in career planning:

- Facilitates alignment between personality and career fields
- Enhances awareness of individual learning styles
- Supports better coping mechanisms for workplace challenges
- Improves job-search strategies and opportunity assessment

## **7. Skills, Abilities, and Talents**

Career decisions should reflect an individual's aptitudes and competencies. Trait-factor theories focus on identifying the unique traits of individuals and matching them with the requirements of specific occupations. By assessing personal strengths, individuals can be directed toward roles in which they are most likely to excel and thrive.

## **8. Social and Economic Conditions**

External factors such as economic trends, labor market conditions, and life events significantly shape career trajectories. The Social Cognitive Career Theory and Social Learning Theory recognize the profound impact of societal dynamics on career development. Understanding this relationship allows for more realistic and adaptive career planning in the face of changing opportunities and constraints.

So, by taking into account the multifaceted influences on career choice—ranging from personal interests to broader socio-economic conditions—career counselors and individuals can adopt a more informed and integrative approach. This understanding supports strategic decision-making, enabling individuals to pursue careers that are both personally fulfilling and contextually viable.

### **Making Career Decisions**

The process of career decision-making is far more complex than merely selecting an occupation. It encompasses a series of interconnected choices that begin during adolescence and continue throughout an individual's professional life. Adolescents often underestimate the significance of early decisions, yet these initial steps can profoundly influence long-term career trajectories.

Career choices are influenced by a range of factors, including personal interests, core values, acquired skills, societal expectations, and prevailing economic conditions. Rather than being a singular event, career decision-making should be understood as a dynamic and evolving journey. Individuals constantly reassess and adapt their choices in response to life events, educational experiences, and shifts in the labor market.

Moreover, adolescents frequently experience internal conflicts when trying to align their personal aspirations with familial expectations, cultural values, and practical responsibilities. This underscores the importance of a developmental approach to career planning—one that evolves with time and experience.

Bordin (1984) conceptualized life as a sequence of vocational decisions, with each choice reflecting a quest for alignment between one's abilities, values, and professional roles. This continuous navigation emphasizes adaptability and lifelong engagement with the process of career development.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study explores how career decision self-efficacy, ambiguity tolerance, locus of control, and family environment contribute to predicting career anxiety among adolescents.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To examine the relationship between career decision self-efficacy, ambiguity tolerance, locus of control, family environment, and career anxiety.
- To determine the extent to which these factors predict career anxiety in adolescents.

### **Variables**

- **Independent Variables:** Career Decision Self-Efficacy, Career Decision Ambiguity Tolerance, Locus of Control, Family Environment
- **Dependent Variable:** Career Anxiety

### **Hypotheses of the Study**

- H1: CDSE is negatively related to career anxiety.
- H2: Preference for ambiguity is negatively related to career anxiety.
- H3: Ambiguity tolerance is negatively related to career anxiety.
- H4: Ambiguity aversion is positively related to career anxiety.
- H5: External LOC is positively related to career anxiety.
- H6: Supportive family environment is negatively related to career anxiety.
- H7: CDSE, ambiguity tolerance, LOC, and family environment will significantly predict career anxiety.

### **Sample Size and Sampling Technique**

For the present study, questionnaires were distributed among a larger pool of students. After preliminary screening and application of specific exclusion criteria, a total of 125 students were selected as the final sample. Participants who were raised by single parents, had a history of psychiatric conditions, were boarders, or belonged to lower socio-economic backgrounds were excluded from the final analysis to maintain sample homogeneity. The selected participants were from Class X and XII of public schools in Uttar Pradesh. The purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that the sample fit the defined inclusion criteria relevant to the study objectives.

### **Research Methods**

The survey method was adopted to collect primary data from the participants. Structured questionnaires were administered to the selected sample to assess various psychological and environmental variables influencing career decision-making.

### **Research Design**

The study followed a correlational research design to explore the relationships among variables such as career anxiety, family environment, self-efficacy in decision-making, tolerance for ambiguity, and locus of control.

### **Tools Used for Measuring Variables**

The following standardized psychological instruments were used for data collection:

- **Career Anxiety Scale** (Brown & Strange, 1981)

- **Family Environment Scale** (Bhatia & Chadha, 1974)
- **Locus of Control Scale** (Rotter, 1966)
- **Career Decision Self-Efficacy Scale** (Betz & Taylor, 2012)
- **Career Decision Ambiguity Tolerance Scale** (Xu & Tracey, 2015)

#### **Ethical Considerations**

- **Informed Consent:** Participants were fully briefed about the purpose, procedure, and voluntary nature of the study. Consent was obtained from each participant.
- **Confidentiality:** Data collected were kept confidential and anonymized. No individual responses were shared with school authorities, parents, or mentors.

#### **Analysis and Interpretation of Data**

The study employed Mean, Standard Deviation, Correlation, and Multiple Regression Analysis to interpret the collected data and identify the relationships among the study variables.

#### **Statistical Analysis**

Statistical analysis was carried out using descriptive (Mean and Standard Deviation) and inferential methods (Correlation and Multiple Regression) to explore the predictive influence of Family Environment (FE), Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE), Career Decision Ambiguity Tolerance (CDAT), and Locus of Control (LOC) on Career Anxiety (CA).

#### **The intent of this study was two-fold:**

1. To assess the relationship between Family Environment (FE), Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE), Career Decision Ambiguity Tolerance (CDAT), Locus of Control (LOC), and Career Anxiety (CA) in adolescents.
2. To examine the contribution of FE, CDSE, CDAT, and LOC in determining career anxiety among adolescents.

#### **SECTION A: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS**

This section outlines the descriptive statistics, including the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values for the key variables under investigation: Career Anxiety (CA), Family Environment (FE), Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE), Career Decision Ambiguity Tolerance (Preference, Tolerance, Aversion), and Locus of Control (LOC). The data was collected from students in Classes 10 and 12 across various public schools in Uttar Pradesh.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample**

<b>Class</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>
X	32	30
XII	33	30

The total sample size (N) is 125, consisting of adolescents from both Class X and Class XII. The sample includes an almost equal representation of boys and girls from public educational institutions across Uttar Pradesh.

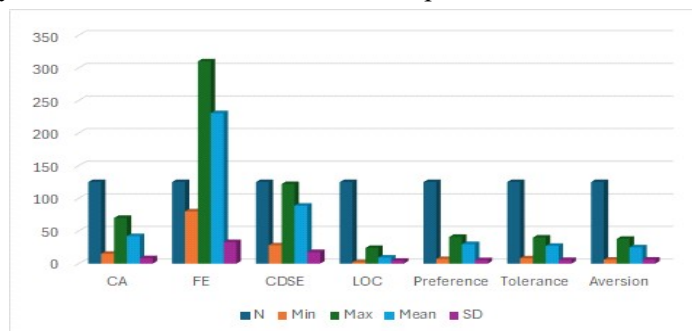
**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for CA, FE, CDSE, LOC, Preference, Tolerance, and Aversion**

Variables	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
CA	125	15	70	42.13	8.42
FE	125	80	310	230.45	32.87
CDSE	125	28	122	88.72	17.64
LOC	125	2	24	9.17	4.43
Preference	125	7	41	29.85	5.33
Tolerance	125	8	40	27.19	5.47
Aversion	125	6	38	24.91	6.11

**Interpretation:**

- The mean score for Career Anxiety (CA) is 42.13, indicating moderate levels of anxiety among the students surveyed.
- The Family Environment (FE) has a mean of 230.45, suggesting relatively supportive family conditions.
- The CDSE mean score of 88.72 reflects a fair level of confidence among students in making career-related decisions.
- The Locus of Control (LOC) mean value is 9.17, while values for ambiguity tolerance subscales are: Preference – 29.85, Tolerance – 27.19, and Aversion – 24.91.

Standard deviation (SD) values indicate the spread of data around the mean. The SD for CA is 8.42, for FE is 32.87, and for CDSE is 17.64, demonstrating moderate variability across responses. LOC, Preference, Tolerance, and Aversion also display reasonable variation in student responses.



**Figure 5: Descriptive Statistics for CA, FE, CDSE, LOC, Preference, Tolerance, and Aversion**

A bar graph illustrates the mean scores of all the variables: CA, FE, CDSE, LOC, Preference, Tolerance, and Aversion. This visual representation aids in understanding the comparative levels of each variable in the sample population.

### SECTION B – CORRELATION ANALYSIS

To examine the strength and direction of the relationships between the key psychological and environmental variables, Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was computed. All analyses were conducted using the full dataset of N = 125 participants from Uttar Pradesh.

**Table 4.3: Correlation Matrix among Career Anxiety (CA), Family Environment (FE), Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE), Locus of Control (LOC), Preference (PRE), Tolerance (TOL), and Aversion (AVE)**

	FE	CDSE	LOC	PRE	TOL	AVE
CA	-.577**	-.317**	.275**	-.749**	-.075*	.561**
FE	1	.386**	-.288**	.683**	.100**	-.341**
CDSE		1	-.276**	.397**	0.057	-.142**
LOC			1	-.372**	.108**	0.016
PRE				1	.099**	-.496**
TOL					1	.072*
AVE						1

Note:  $p < 0.05$ ,  $p < 0.01$

The correlation results demonstrate several significant relationships among the variables. Career Anxiety (CA) was found to have a significant negative correlation with Family Environment (FE) ( $r = -0.577$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE) ( $r = -0.317$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and Preference for Ambiguity (PRE) ( $r = -0.749$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). CA exhibited a significant positive correlation with Locus of Control (LOC) ( $r = 0.275$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and Aversion to Ambiguity (AVE) ( $r = 0.561$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), while a weaker but still significant negative correlation was observed with Tolerance for Ambiguity (TOL) ( $r = -0.075$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

FE correlated positively with CDSE ( $r = 0.386$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and PRE ( $r = 0.683$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and negatively with LOC ( $r = -0.288$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and AVE ( $r = -0.341$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). FE and TOL were also significantly positively correlated ( $r = 0.100$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

CDSE was positively related to PRE ( $r = 0.397$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and negatively related to LOC ( $r = -0.276$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and AVE ( $r = -0.142$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), while its correlation with TOL was not statistically significant ( $r = 0.057$ ). LOC was significantly negatively correlated with PRE ( $r = -0.372$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and positively with TOL ( $r = 0.108$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), but showed no significant correlation with AVE ( $r = 0.016$ ).

### **SECTION C – REGRESSION ANALYSIS**

A multiple linear regression analysis was carried out to determine the predictive power of Family Environment (FE), Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE), Locus of Control (LOC), Preference (PRE), Tolerance (TOL), and Aversion (AVE) for Career Anxiety (CA). The analysis was performed using SPSS version 21.

**Table 4.4: Model Summary**

<b>Model</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Std. Error of Estimate</b>	<b>F Change</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
1	.787	.619	.617	5.299	262.611	.000

The regression model was statistically significant ( $F = 262.611, p < 0.001$ ), with an adjusted  $R^2$  of 0.617, indicating that approximately 61.7% of the variance in Career Anxiety can be explained by the combined influence of FE, CDSE, LOC, PRE, TOL, and AVE among the UP sample.

**Table 4.5: Coefficients of Predictors of Career Anxiety**

<b>Predictor</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Beta</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>r</b>	<b>Coefficient of Determination</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
(Constant)	65.814	2.221		29.638			.000
Family Environment	-0.028	0.007	-0.115	-4.156	-0.577	0.066	.000
Career Decision SE	-0.008	0.011	-0.018	-0.804	-0.317	0.005	.422
Locus of Control	0.073	0.041	0.039	1.769	0.275	0.010	.077
Preference for Ambiguity	-0.862	0.053	-0.514	-16.394	-0.749	0.384	.000
Tolerance for Ambiguity	-0.040	0.031	-0.026	-1.307	-0.075	0.001	.192
Aversion for Ambiguity	0.362	0.032	0.266	11.285	0.561	0.149	.000

**Model Fit:**  $R^2 = 0.619, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.617, F = 262.611, p < 0.001$

#### **Interpretation:**

Among the predictor variables, Preference for Ambiguity had the largest unique contribution, explaining 38.4% of the variance in Career Anxiety. A higher preference for ambiguity was associated with a significant reduction in career anxiety. Family Environment accounted for 6.6% of the variance, and Aversion for Ambiguity explained an additional 14.9%. These variables were found to be statistically significant predictors in the model.

In contrast, Career Decision Self-Efficacy and Tolerance for Ambiguity did not significantly predict career anxiety in this sample. Although Locus of Control had a modest correlation with Career Anxiety, its regression coefficient was not statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Overall, the regression analysis highlights that psychological dispositions toward ambiguity (both preference and aversion) and the quality of family environment are key determinants of career anxiety among young individuals in Uttar Pradesh.

## **Findings**

The primary objective of this study was twofold: (1) to examine the relationship between Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE), career decision ambiguity tolerance, locus of control, family environment, and career anxiety in adolescents, and (2) to determine the extent to which these variables predict career anxiety. The findings broadly supported all proposed hypotheses and yielded meaningful insights into the interplay of psychological and environmental factors affecting adolescents' career anxiety.

### **SECTION A – CORRELATION ANALYSIS**

#### **Hypothesis 1: CDSE and Career Anxiety.**

A significant negative correlation was found between CDSE and career anxiety ( $r = -.317, p < 0.01$ ). Adolescents with higher CDSE reported lower anxiety, suggesting that confidence in making career-related decisions reduces emotional distress. This aligns with findings by Smith & Betz (2002, 2022), though our study's regional context (Uttar Pradesh) suggests additional socio-cultural factors may mediate this relationship.

#### **Hypothesis 2: Preference for Ambiguity and Career Anxiety.**

A strong negative correlation was observed between preference for ambiguity and career anxiety ( $r = -.749, p < 0.01$ ). Adolescents more open to exploring uncertain or unclear career paths experienced significantly lower anxiety. Prior studies (e.g., Xu & Tracey, 2015; Kramer, 2006) similarly highlight the adaptive role of ambiguity preference in career decision-making.

#### **Hypothesis 3: Ambiguity Tolerance and Career Anxiety.**

A modest but significant negative correlation was found between ambiguity tolerance and career anxiety ( $r = -.075, p < 0.05$ ). Adolescents who could accept uncertainty and adapt to unclear situations in career planning reported reduced anxiety. These findings resonate with prior research (Hacker et al., 2021; Arbona & Phang, 2021) emphasizing the importance of psychological readiness in managing career uncertainty.

#### **Hypothesis 4: There will be a significant positive relationship between aversion to ambiguity and career anxiety.**

The results reveal a significant positive correlation between aversion to ambiguity and career anxiety ( $r = 0.561, p < 0.05$ ). This indicates that individuals who tend to avoid ambiguous situations in career decision-making are likely to

experience higher levels of anxiety. A strong aversion to ambiguity may lead to increased stress and discomfort when dealing with uncertain career choices or unclear job prospects. In contrast, those more tolerant of ambiguity may better manage uncertainty and show lower levels of career-related anxiety. These findings are supported by Park, Garrison, and Liu (2020), who observed that individuals avoiding complex career decisions tend to experience heightened anxiety.

**Hypothesis 5: There will be a significant positive relationship between external locus of control and career anxiety.**

Findings show a significant positive relationship between external locus of control and career anxiety ( $r = 0.275$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This suggests that individuals who attribute life outcomes to external forces are more prone to career-related anxiety. Such individuals may feel powerless in the face of career challenges, intensifying their stress. Conversely, those with an internal locus of control—who believe in influencing their own outcomes—are likely to experience less anxiety. Smith and Jones (2019) highlighted similar results, noting that an external locus of control correlates with increased anxiety due to a perceived lack of control over future careers.

**Hypothesis 6: There will be a significant negative relationship between a supportive family environment and career anxiety.**

The analysis indicates a significant negative relationship between a supportive family environment and career anxiety ( $r = -0.577$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This means that adolescents with emotionally supportive and communicative families report lower levels of anxiety. Supportive environments promote self-confidence and emotional resilience, enabling individuals to manage career-related stress more effectively. Herman et al. (2020) also found that family cohesion is associated with reduced anxiety and better psychological adjustment in adolescents.

## **SECTION B – REGRESSION ANALYSIS**

One of the key objectives of this study was to examine whether Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE), Career Decision Ambiguity Tolerance, Locus of Control, and Family Environment could significantly predict career anxiety among adolescents. To explore this, a multiple linear regression was conducted using data from 125 students in Uttar Pradesh.

**Hypothesis 7:**

*CDSE, career decision ambiguity tolerance, locus of control, and family environment will significantly predict career anxiety.*

The regression results revealed that Family Environment, Preference for Ambiguity, and Aversion to Ambiguity emerged as significant predictors of career

anxiety. The overall model was statistically significant, explaining 61.7% of the variance in career anxiety ( $Adjusted R^2 = 0.617$ ;  $F = 262.611$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).

### Conclusion

This research, conducted on a sample of 125 participants from Uttar Pradesh, offers a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of the psychological dimensions underpinning career anxiety. By analyzing key constructs such as Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE), ambiguity tolerance, locus of control (LOC), and family environment (FE), the study delves into the multifactorial nature of emotional responses associated with career decision-making.

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