



## Gender-Based Differences in Anxiety Levels Among Vocational High School Students When Entering the Workforce

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**Abstract.** Not many studies have examined differences in anxiety in facing the world of work based on gender, specifically in vocational students. Previous research has conducted several studies on anxiety in vocational students. The purpose of this study is to determine the differences in the level of anxiety of vocational students towards the world of work based on their gender. The number of samples in this study was 233 students, of which 173 were male and 60 were female. This study uses a descriptive quantitative approach, with a disproportionate stratified random sampling technique and anxiety scale used to collect data. Data processing in this study uses a normality test and homogeneity test, and data analysis using a T-test by applying IBM SPSS Statistics software version 25. The results of data analysis in the T-test show a significance level value of .737(>.05), which means that there is no difference in the level of anxiety in vocational school students in facing the world of work based on gender, which means H<sub>0</sub> is accepted, and H<sub>1</sub> is rejected. The results of our study indicate that gender-based anxiety in the world of work in men emphasizes the abilities they have while women emphasize feelings.

**Keywords:** *anxiety; gender; vocational students*

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## Introduction

The role of human resources (HR) is an important part of the global competition that is currently developing. These human resources are directed at individuals who have high quality, have the necessary skills, and are ready to work. The existence of education in designing and developing the quality of human resources can also be the main factor. According to the third article of Law No. 20 of 2003, the purpose of national education is to improve the quality of human resources through various creative and efficient national initiatives. This will allow the younger generation to develop optimally and get the support and environment they need.

Secondary education focused on providing students to be ready to work in a particular expertise is vocational education, as stated in article 15 of the National Education System Law No. 20 on the National Education System (UUSPN). Vocational High School (SMK) is one type of formal education institution that provides vocational education at the secondary education level with the intention of preparing students to enter the workforce. Students are expected to have knowledge that can be applied in the workplace.

There are not many studies that examine differences in anxiety in facing the workforce based on gender specifically in vocational high school students. Previous studies have conducted several investigations on anxiety among vocational high school students. However, these studies were linked to other variables such as self-efficacy studied by Adjarwati, et al., (2020) which stated that self-efficacy has a negative relationship with anxiety. Azhari and Mirza (2016) in their research stated that self-regulation has a negative relationship with anxiety in facing the workforce. This has led the researcher to be interested in conducting a study on the differences in anxiety levels when facing the workforce, viewed from a gender perspective.

From brief interviews conducted with students, it was found that they experience anxiety when imagining the challenges they may face in the workforce. Many expressed fear of being unable to complete tasks assigned by others, primarily due to a lack of sufficient experience. Additionally, some students are afraid of not being accepted by their future colleagues, feel anxious about adapting to the work environment, and worry whether they will be able to perform their tasks correctly. Competition in the job market also contributes to their concerns about the future, especially due to the presence of individuals who rely on personal connections to secure employment opportunities.

After graduating from school, students will face new challenges in the workforce. Due to the intense competition in the workplace, finding a job becomes one of the first major issues they encounter. The demand for high-quality jobs continues to rise each year, making it increasingly difficult for individuals to secure employment. The limited availability of job opportunities, combined with the high number of job seekers, creates an imbalance that leads to unemployment.

According to the National Labor Force Survey (Sakernas) by Statistics Indonesia (BPS), 8.43 million Indonesians were unemployed as of August 2022. High school graduates made up the majority of the open unemployment group, while those who had never attended school represented the smallest percentage. Specifically, there were 1.66 million unemployed senior/vocational high school graduates, 673.49 thousand (7.99%) unemployed university graduates, and 159.49 thousand (1.89%) unemployed academy/diploma graduates (Badan Pusat Statistik, [2022](#)).

According to Awalia et al. ([2023](#)), future anxiety among vocational high school (SMK) students arises when they graduate and begin a new chapter in their careers. The high unemployment rate indicates that more people are seeking jobs, but limited job opportunities and increasingly strict company requirements intensify competition among candidates, especially for vocational school graduates. Each year, many individuals remain unemployed due to the persistent lack of employment opportunities. Somantri ([2007](#)) argues that difficulties in obtaining employment in the community result in anxiety. Although SMK graduates are expected to enter the workforce, companies tend to prioritize experience and skills as key criteria in hiring decisions. Consequently, many vocational school graduates feel afraid to enter the job market due to their lack of work experience and the limited availability of job openings.

An increasing number of vocational high school (SMK) graduates remain unemployed due to growing competition in the job market. One's perception of the workforce is shaped by the intensifying challenges within it. This has led many 12th-grade SMK students to experience anxiety as they prepare to enter the workforce. In reality, many SMK graduates either remain unemployed or are employed in jobs that do not align with the skills they acquired during their vocational education (Yulianti & Khafid, [2015](#)). This mismatch contributes to heightened anxiety among SMK students. According to Mu'arifah ([2005](#)), individuals who are unable to manage their anxiety may develop behavioral disorders, often manifested through avoidance behaviors.

Anxiety is a condition when negative feelings arise due to thinking about unexpected threats that may arise in the future (Annisa & Ifdil, [2016](#)). Anxiety is a natural human emotion because it functions to remind humans of the threats they will face (Suwandi & Malinti, [2020](#)). Anxiety is an unpleasant feeling that can be felt at various levels, marked by words such as worried, concerned, and afraid (Atkinson, [2015](#)).

Nevid, et al., ([2005](#)) defines anxiety as an emotional condition characterized by uncomfortable levels of tension, high physical activity, and fear of something negative. Anxiety is a feeling of fear or irrational worry. Nevid et al. ([2005](#)) stated that a person's career is one of the factors that can trigger anxiety. When individuals begin to enter the workforce, they may experience feelings of fear or worry, commonly referred to as anxiety about entering the job

market. Various factors contribute to this anxiety, including rising unemployment, intense competition, the limited number of job vacancies, lack of experience, and increasing skill requirements.

Nevid, et al., (2005) said that anxiety consists of three aspects, namely: physical, behavioral and cognitive reactions. Physical reactions are reactions in the body that appear in someone who is anxious. While behavior is someone who experiences anxiety who shows behavior of ignoring anything, which makes him feel anxious. While cognitive reaction is anxiety that causes someone to think too much about the situation.

Hammad (2016), in his research, stated that gender influences the level of anxiety in facing the workforce, with males tending to experience higher anxiety compared to females. Mukminina and Abidin (2020) found that males and females use different coping techniques. Males tend to use strategies such as managing avoidance, directly solving problems, and sleeping to relieve stress.

Meanwhile, females more often cope by diverting their attention through talking with friends, seeking social support, praying, and using self-talk to manage their emotions. Greenberger and Padesky (1995) explain that anxiety coping strategies target the components affected by anxiety itself, such as thoughts and emotions, through techniques like challenging anxious thoughts, controlled worry periods, and problem solving. Both males and females use the coping technique of challenging anxious thoughts, which involves countering negative thoughts by identifying the situation, the thoughts themselves, and how those thoughts influence their feelings. Lase et al. (2020) demonstrated that effective stress coping strategies can reduce various psychological problems related to stress and anxiety.

Research by Cahyani and Putrianti (2022) showed that workplace anxiety differs based on gender; compared to males, females have higher levels of anxiety. However, a study by Simarmata et al. (2023) found no significant difference in anxiety levels between males and females. According to findings by Suminta and Sayekti (2017), males often operate in an energetic and independent manner, while females typically require teamwork and tend to experience higher levels of anxiety than males.

Different from previous studies that generally examine high school or university students, this study specifically highlights the anxiety of vocational students in facing the workforce in terms of gender. This study aims to determine whether there is a significant difference in the level of anxiety facing the workforce between male and female students at SMK Swasta Sinar Husni.

According to Hurlock's theory (as cited in Sari et al., 2017), anxiety can also be influenced by several factors, one of which is gender. Females often experience anxiety related to feelings of inadequacy more than males. Males tend to be more active and explorative, while females are

generally more sensitive. Additionally, males tend to think rationally, whereas females are more likely to think emotionally. Therefore, the researcher hypothesizes that anxiety levels differ based on gender.

There are 2 hypotheses in the study, namely H0 "There is no significant difference in the level of anxiety in facing the workforce between male and female students in vocational schools" and H1 "There is a significant difference in the level of anxiety in facing the workforce between male and female students in vocational schools".

This study provides both theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, it enriches the psychological understanding of gender-based differences in anxiety among vocational high school (SMK) students as they enter the workforce and contributes to the development of related psychological fields such as recruitment and selection. Practically, the results can help students mentally prepare for the workforce, reduce anxiety based on gender, support schools in designing gender-based interventions, and serve as a reference for future research.

### **Methods**

This study uses a descriptive quantitative approach to examine the differences in anxiety levels among vocational high school (SMK) students in facing the workforce, viewed from the perspective of gender. This approach is employed to accurately, methodically, and factually describe events, facts, and characteristics of a particular population (Lehman, as cited in Yusuf, [2017](#)). Isaac and Michael (as cited in Yusuf, [2017](#)) explain that the purpose of descriptive research is to systematically describe the facts and distinctive characteristics of a population or specific field.

In this study, the population consisted of 722 twelfth-grade students from SMK Swasta Sinar Husni BM & TR Medan. The sample used in this research was 233 students, selected based on Isaac and Michael's table with a 5% margin of error. This study employed a disproportionate stratified random sampling method. According to Sugiyono ([2016](#)), this technique is used to determine the sample size when the population is stratified but not proportional.

This study was designed using one variable, namely anxiety (the dependent variable). The research employed a work-related anxiety scale based on the theory of anxiety aspects consisting of three dimensions: physical reactions, behavioral reactions, and cognitive reactions as proposed by Nevid et al., ([2005](#)). The anxiety scale consists of 48 statements, including 24 favorable items and 24 unfavorable items, with responses measured on a Likert scale: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (agree), and 4 (strongly agree). One example of an item on the anxiety scale is, "I feel dizzy when I hear about the increasingly limited job opportunities."

Before conducting the main study, a pilot test was carried out on November 18, 2024, at SMK Swasta Pangeran Antasari Medan. The pilot test involved 100 students from SMK Swasta Pangeran Antasari. The results showed that 30 out of 48 items on the Anxiety scale were valid, while 18 items were discarded. According to Sugiyono (2016), an item is considered valid if the correlation coefficient between the item and the total score is 0.3 or above, and invalid if below this threshold. Reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha technique, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.877, indicating that the scale is suitable to be used as a data collection instrument in this study.

The study was conducted on November 30, 2024 to December 2, 2024 with a sample of 233 grade XII students (TITL, TKRO, TBSM, OTKP, RPL, AKL TB) at SMK Swasta Sinar Husni BM & TR. Before conducting the study, we had obtained direct permission from the principal of SMK Swasta Sinar Husni Medan. The sample we needed was 233 people so that in collecting the data, it was assisted by the school. The implementation method was by distributing questionnaires directly to students. The time we gave to fill out the questionnaire was 15 minutes. So we don't spend too much time in each class.

The item validity test is used to calculate the levels of validity and authenticity of an instrument (Arikunto, 2013). The results of the anxiety scale measurement tool test were carried out with IBM SPSS Statistics 25. This view is in accordance with the statement of Sugiyono (2016) who explained that the coefficient between the item and the total items is the same or above 0.30, then the item is declared valid, and vice versa. Thus, the results of the validity test which proved that 30 out of 48 items were declared valid.

The Corrected Item Total Correlation method is used for validity testing, valid items with a minimum  $r$  value of 0.30 where the  $r$  value moves from 0.324 to 0.609. For reliability testing, the Alpha Cronbach technique is used with a reliability of 0.877, which means that this scale is suitable for use as a data collection tool in this study. Arikunto, (2013) explains that reliability testing can be applied to determine whether an instrument can be trusted to be used as a data collection tool.

The independent T-test is used for data analysis, that is to determine whether there is a difference in the average between two unrelated or independent sample groups (Zakhariah & Afriani, 2021). Before testing the hypothesis with the Independent T-test, an assumption test is first carried out including a normality test using Kolomogorov Smirnov and a homogeneity test using Levene's test.

## Results

The demographic characteristics of respondents are an important aspect that needs to be conveyed to provide context in interpreting the research results. One of the characteristics studied

is the gender of the respondents. The percentage distribution of samples by gender is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.  
Percentage of samples by gender

No	Gender	Total	Percentage
1	Male	170	73%
2	Female	63	27%
Total		233	100%

Table 1 presents the percentage distribution of the sample based on the gender of the respondents in this study. Of the total 233 respondents, 170 people (73%) were male, while 63 people (27%) were female. This composition shows that the majority of participants in this study were male, so the results of the analysis are likely to be more representative of the perceptions and conditions of the male group.

### Research Data Description

To understand the differences in anxiety levels based on gender, a descriptive statistical analysis was conducted on the empirical and hypothetical anxiety scores in the research sample. The results of the comparison are presented in detail in Table 2.

Table 2.  
Comparison of Descriptive Statistics of Empirical and Hypothetical Anxiety Based on Gender

Gender	Data	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Male	Empirical	31	71	50.7	7.476
	Hypothetical	30	120	75	15
Female	Empirical	33	63	49.77	7.263
	Hypothetical	30	120	75	15

Table 2 shows a comparison of descriptive statistics of empirical and hypothetical anxiety based on gender. In the male group, empirical anxiety scores ranged from 31 to 71 with a mean of 50.70 and a standard deviation of 7.48, while hypothetical anxiety showed a wider range, it is 30 to 120 with a mean of 75.00 and a standard deviation of 15.00. In the female group, empirical anxiety scores ranged from 33 to 63 with a mean of 49.77 and a standard deviation of 7.26, while hypothetical anxiety had the same range and mean value as men, it is 30 to 120 and 75.00 with a standard deviation of 15.00.

Next, individuals will be classified based on their anxiety levels using the categories low, medium and high. The results of the categorization of anxiety levels by gender are presented in detail in Table 3.

Table 3.  
Categorization of Anxiety Data Based on Gender

Categorization of Anxiety	Value range	Male (n)	Male (%)	Female (n)	Female (%)
Low	$X < 60$	148	85.50%	53	88.30%
Moderate	$60 \leq X < 90$	25	14.50%	7	11.70%
High	$\geq 90$	0	0%	0	0%
Total	—	173	100%	60	100%

Table 3 shows the distribution of anxiety level categorization based on gender. In the male group, the majority of respondents (85.5%) were classified as low anxiety (score  $< 60$ ), while 14.5% were in the moderate anxiety level (score 60–89), and none were in the high anxiety category (score  $\geq 90$ ). A similar pattern was also seen in the female group, with 88.3% in the low category and 11.7% in the moderate category, while the high category was not found.

Furthermore, to provide an overview of the level of anxiety in facing the workforce in male and female respondents, table 4 presents descriptive statistics in the form of mean values and standard deviations (SD) based on the three aspects of anxiety, namely physical, behavioral, and cognitive reactions

Table 4.  
Descriptive Statistics of Work-Related Anxiety Based on Gender

Anxiety Aspects	Gender	N	Empirical Mean	Empirical SD	Hypothetical Mean
Physical Reaction	Male	173	5.68	1.01	7.5
Physical Reaction	Female	60	5.42	1.16	7.5
Behavioral Reaction	Male	173	15.64	2.6	25
Behavioral Reaction	Female	60	15.22	2.4	25
Cognitive Reaction	Male	173	29.28	4.8	42.5
Cognitive Reaction	Female	60	29.13	4.7	42.5

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics of work-related anxiety based on anxiety aspects and gender. In the physical reaction aspect. male respondents had an empirical mean of 5.68 with a standard deviation of 1.01. while female respondents had a slightly lower mean of 5.42 with an SD of 1.16; both had the same hypothetical mean of 7.5. In the behavioral aspect. males recorded an empirical mean of 15.64 (SD = 2.6) and females 15.22 (SD = 2.4). with both having an identical hypothetical mean of 25. In the cognitive aspect. the empirical mean was 29.28 (SD = 4.8) for males and 29.13 (SD = 4.7) for females. while the hypothetical mean was 42.5 for both.

### Assumption Test Results

To ensure whether there are errors in the data collected from the measuring instrument. an assumption test is carried out before testing the hypothesis. One of the requirements to meet normality in parametric statistical data analysis is the normality test (Riadi, [2014](#)). This test is

applied to ensure whether the data population is normally distributed or not. According to Ismail, (2018) data is said to be normal if  $p > 0.05$ . The results of the normality test can be seen in table 5.

Table 5.  
Normality Test Results

Classification	SD	Asymp. Sig (2-tailed)	p(sig.)	Explanation
Male	7.476	0.200	$p > 0.05$	Normal Distribution
Female	7.263	0.200	$p > 0.05$	Normal Distribution

Source: Data Processing Results. SPSS v.25.

Based on table 5. the normality test for men and women. obtained Asymp. Sig (2-tailed) for men 0.200 with  $p > 0.05$  indicating the distribution of data in men is normal. Asymp. Sig (2-tailed) for women obtained 0.200 with  $p > 0.05$  indicating the distribution of values in women is normal.

Furthermore. to compare two or more variants in determining whether their distribution comes from a homogeneous population. a homogeneity test must be carried out (Riadi, 2014) If two or more data groups have the same variants. there is no need to repeat the homogeneity test. The results of the homogeneity test can be seen in table 6.

Table 6.  
Homogeneity Test Results

Anxiety	<i>Levene Statistic</i>	df1	df2	Sig.
	0.113	1	231	0.737

Source: Data Processing Results. SPSS v.25.

Based on the output results in the table above. the anxiety variable for male and female genders obtained a significance value of more than 0.05. which is 0.737. indicating that the anxiety variable is homogeneous.

### Hypothesis Test Results

After the assumption test is approved. a hypothesis test is conducted. This study is based on two hypotheses. they are  $H_0$  and  $H_1$ .  $H_1$  shows that there is a significant difference in the level of anxiety of male and female students regarding the workforce. while  $H_0$  shows that there is no significant difference between the level of anxiety of male and female students. Descriptive quantitative tests are conducted in accordance with the objectives of the study. The results of the statistical test are presented in table 7.

Table 7.  
Hypothesis Test Results

Anxiety Variable	* equal variances assumed	F	p-value	t-value	df
		0.113	0.737	0.917	231

Source: Data Processing Results. SPSS v.25.

Table 7 shows the results of the hypothesis test for the anxiety variable with the assumption of equal variances assumed. The F value of 0.113 with a p-value of 0.737 indicates that there is no significant difference in variance between men and women. Furthermore, the t value of 0.917 with a degree of freedom (df) of 231 and a p-value greater than 0.05 indicates that there is no significant difference in anxiety levels between men and women. Thus, the null hypothesis stating that there is no difference in anxiety is accepted.

### Discussion

This is supported by research from Simarmata, et al., (2023) stating that there is no difference in anxiety between men and women, male and female students in medium and low groups have the same level of anxiety. This can be understood that currently there are no different societal demands for graduates based on gender. Anxiety related to the workforce can also be interpreted as a temporary negative emotion caused by uncertainty about possible outcomes, which makes people worry (Susilarini, 2022).

Hanim and Ahlas (2019) stated that students experiencing anxiety often appear unprepared, both in thought and behavior, to face the challenges of the professional world. They tend to lack confidence in their abilities and worry about failing to compete for jobs. According to Daradjat (2009), common fears and concerns about future careers include the limited availability of job opportunities and the intense competition in the workforce. Behaviorally, this anxiety may manifest in withdrawal from activities that promote self-development, avoidance of situations related to the workforce, and a lack of effort in gaining relevant experience in their field of interest.

Based on the anxiety aspects shown by men and women, it is more on the cognitive aspect. People who are worried about their jobs will experience negative thoughts about their ability to deal with work situations, believe that they are unable to handle problems and worry about negative things (Greenberg & Padesky, 1995). Negative thoughts that arise cause a person's condition to become uncomfortable.

They have high self-confidence, accompanied by an optimistic attitude in facing competition in the workforce, and a strong belief that they are able to overcome challenges without experiencing failure. Lauster (in Shofiah, 2002) stated that self-confidence is a belief in one's own abilities so that someone is not influenced by others. They also have high spirits when thinking about their future career plans. Skinner et al., (1998) stated that adolescents who have a high level of self-efficacy, have more value in determining their goals concretely, forming logical plans, and feeling challenged to achieve goals.

Lack of supportive skills will also increase anxiety when facing the workforce. Nurjanah (2018) stated that soft skills such as leadership, public speaking, experience in organizations, self-

confidence, and information about job vacancies can have an impact on anxiety when facing the workforce. Male students at SMK Swasta Sinar Husni Medan feel that the skills they have are not enough to be used to compete in the world of work. Nevid, et al., (2005) stated that anxiety is a state of worry due to complaining that something bad will happen soon. Anxiety is considered an emotional state characterized by physiological arousal, unpleasant feelings, and the emergence of feelings that something bad will happen.

Anxiety is a brief period of nervousness or fear that a person experiences when faced with a difficult experience in life (Greenberger & Padesky, 2004). Due to the increasingly tight competition in terms of education and experience, anxiety in the workforce is considered quite difficult. There are several things that must be prepared, such as skills in certain fields, knowledge, understanding and personality, so that a person can feel comfortable at work and ultimately succeed at work (Pooll & Sewell, 2007).

This also occurs in individuals experiencing work-related anxiety, where they tend to avoid anything related to the world of work due to internal conflicts and individual thought patterns, such as the emergence of fear and anxiety about the professional world (Scarvanovi & Putri, 2020). A study conducted by Risnia and Sugiasih (2019) found that due to a lack of self-confidence, some students experience anxiety about entering the workforce, which manifests in the form of fear, stress, disorientation, loss of appetite, and excessive worry.

They also enjoy participating in activities that support and enhance both their hard and soft skills. Santoso et al. (2019) stated that vocational high school graduates who possess strong soft skills are more likely to succeed in the competitive job market, as they can adapt more quickly and ultimately achieve career success. Female students, in particular, have a strong belief in their ability to adapt well in the professional world, and they already envision the workplace as a positive and enjoyable environment. The hope is that individuals will continue to move forward without being hindered by the fear of failure (Fitri et al., 2018). As a result, female students are generally ready to face the challenges of the workforce and believe that they will continue to grow once they enter the professional world.

The professional world does not solely select candidates based on academic competence (hard skills); it also places significant emphasis on other important capabilities, including honesty, responsibility, politeness, discipline, commitment, self-confidence, ethics, teamwork, creativity, communication, and leadership, collectively known as soft skills. Research shows that 75% of job success is determined by soft skills, while only 25% is influenced by hard skills (Abbas et al., 2013). Consequently, many women perceive it as difficult to secure employment and often avoid topics or situations related to the workforce. For instance, even after putting in significant effort to achieve their desired careers, women tend to shift the conversation away from career-related

matters. Although they want to pursue employment, their perceived lack of sufficient ability causes them to hesitate when taking further steps. According to Hussin (as cited in Hanifa, [2017](#)), anxiety about entering the workforce can stem from cognitive factors such as negative perceptions and worries about being unable to handle job responsibilities, emotional factors like tension about uncertain and intimidating future conditions, and social demands such as high expectations and success standards imposed by others.

For some individuals, facing competition and obstacles in the workplace is something scary, causing them to feel stressed, worried, or afraid (Sari & Astuti, [2014](#)). In psychology, both conditions are called anxiety and both often appear at the same time when someone is faced with a situation or condition that does not pose a threat to their safety and well-being, either real or unreal (Safaria & Ashari, [2021](#)).

According to Sari & Astuti ([2014](#)), anxiety in facing the workforce is an individual's self-assessment of the achievement of goals related to the world of work that are uncertain and unpredictable, causing internal conflict that results in disrupted thought patterns such as fear and worry about the world of work. Disrupted thought patterns such as avoiding all kinds of things related to the workforce, as well as disrupted physiological responses such as sweating or heart palpitations when in contact with the workforce. The emergence of disturbing worries so that it is assumed that there will be many bad things experienced when entering the workforce.

Based on the results of this study, it can be obtained that the anxiety experienced by men emphasizes the abilities they have and bad thoughts about the future. While in women, it emphasizes more on feelings where women try to avoid things that make them stressed. According to Hamilton and Fagot ([1988](#)) men tend to use problem focused coping because men usually use reason or logic, while women tend to use emotion-focused coping because they use feelings or are more emotional so they rarely use logic or reason. Students need support from people in their environment, such as parents, to reduce their fears about the workforce. According to research from Sekarina and Indriana ([2018](#)) parental social support has a strong role in helping reduce anxiety in the workforce. With social encouragement from parents, students can become more confident in themselves and feel appreciated in the family.

Our research findings indicate that gender-based anxiety during the transition to the workforce is closely linked to social norms and gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes often portray women as weaker than men and suggest that certain jobs are designated specifically for men or for women (Chandra, [2017](#)). Meanwhile, men frequently experience pressure to pursue occupations deemed "masculine" in order to meet societal expectations. In this context, the theory of gender role conflict highlights the tension between societal expectations and personal aspirations. Naully ([2002](#)), citing O'Neal's theory, explains that gender role conflict is a

psychological condition in which gender roles have negative consequences for the individual or others.

At school, guidance and counseling (GC) teachers play a crucial role as providers of social support, helping to reduce anxiety and strengthen students' work readiness through gender-sensitive counseling approaches and the enhancement of soft skills. GC teachers are responsible for guiding students in choosing career paths that align with their personal potential and current labor market trends (Seveningsih, 2024). They can organize training programs related to career preparation to help students transition into the workforce. As student companions in schools, GC teachers are expected to help minimize students' anxiety about entering the workforce. As stated by Mardiana (2017), the role of a GC teacher as a motivator is essential in encouraging students to face their career-related anxiety with confidence. Thus, these findings enrich the approach to career guidance by offering a more inclusive, relevant, and contextual perspective on gender-based challenges in the workplace.

The findings of this study can only be generalized to the specific vocational school students who were included in the sample, considering the differences in characteristics between schools. This research employed a quantitative method using a single scale, the anxiety scale, derived from one instrument to measure the level of anxiety. The study focused solely on one school and did not include schools from other regions, which could have provided broader comparative insights. Additionally, the research design utilized only one variable, without considering other potential variables that may influence anxiety.

This limitation may affect the diversity of perspectives in identifying students' anxiety levels more comprehensively. Therefore, future researchers are encouraged to employ a mixed-method approach to strengthen quantitative findings with qualitative data and to involve more schools from different regions. Future studies may also further explore differences in work-related anxiety across various domains such as subjects, environments, age groups, or cultural backgrounds. Additionally, they could examine the relationship between anxiety and other variables such as social support, bullying, coping mechanisms, and self-esteem.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference in anxiety levels between male and female students. The anxiety experienced by male students tends to focus on their perceived abilities and negative thoughts about the future. In contrast, female students' anxiety is more influenced by emotions, where they tend to avoid situations that may cause them stress. Therefore, students greatly need social support from their parents to help boost their self-confidence.

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