



# International Journal of Research in Human Resource Management

E-ISSN: 2663-3361  
P-ISSN: 2663-3213  
IJRHRM 2023; 5(2): 116-125  
[www.humanresourcejournal.com](http://www.humanresourcejournal.com)  
Received: 13-08-2023  
Accepted: 20-09-2023

**Uzma Jahan**  
Department of Business  
Studies, College of Economics  
and Business Administration,  
University of Technology and  
Applied Sciences, Muscat,  
Sultanate of Oman, Oman

## Job search in the age of pandemic: How COVID 19 anxiety influences the job search behaviour of graduate students: An empirical analysis

**Uzma Jahan**

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.33545/26633213.2023.v5.i2b.155>

### Abstract

This study is aimed to discover impact of COVID-19 anxiety on job search behavior among new graduate students at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Oman. The main objective of the study is focus on understand the relationship among covid-19 anxiety and job search behavior among the newly graduate student. It is crucial to understand how the new graduate students are able to encounter pandemic consequences and how they are managing the level of anxiety in this difficult situation while searching for jobs. With regard to the situation of COVID-19, the time available was limited to collect whatever information we need in the study and the collection of data was done mainly through the internet. We claim that the epidemic of COVID-19 created a significant occurrence because it was new, worrying, and life-threatening. We test this theory by giving graduate students a questionnaire to see how COVID-19 has influenced their job-search behavior. The researchers were able to get responses from 164 respondents both job seekers and employees. The study found that most of the new graduated students feel very concerned about their future and because of the country's economic conditions. Moreover, from the study we found that many of the job seekers, the job search behaviour is different from prior pandemic (COVID-19). The study suggests relationship between anxiety and job search behaviour is very strong.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 anxiety, job search behavior, pandemic

### 1. Introduction

History documents that pandemics causes public health crisis, carries both health (mental and physical) and economic implications. Uncertainties about the future, disturbances to social care, immense economic difficulties and experiences of disease and death of family and friends, fears of physical safety have been related to extreme psychological distress that may increase the risk of suicide or contribute to an increase in suicide attempts as the ultimate solution for people (Zandifar & Badrfam, 2020) <sup>[20]</sup> However, the COVID-19 epidemic has significantly affected the labor sector, with unemployment rates hitting all-time highs in many nations. Graduate students preparing to enter the workforce face particular difficulties as they negotiate the labor market in this historic era. Anxiety levels among job seekers have risen because of the pandemic's unpredictability and the economic crisis. Changing how they work virtually overnight meant either slowing or even freezing most of the recruitment activities (Anjum, A. 2022) <sup>[4]</sup>. When we move on to the new reality, work will continue to change and most businesses are reflecting on the way they work and the skills, knowledge and experience required in the business industry. Each industry and every business will respond to the current situation by making decisions based on their present conditions. However, if you are in the position to hire right now or are planning the next steps, it is still essential for you as candidates to understand business perspective, mindset, and goals in the pandemic situation because everything is being changed (Tulsie, 2020) <sup>[46]</sup>. During the COVID-19, many of non-Omani worker left Oman by themselves because of no more chances to continue anymore, so that will give some opportunity for the local to get a job, but the problem is still not solved yet regarding to have a chance of getting a job (Abel *et al.* (2017) <sup>[1]</sup> As the economic problems are faced by every country so the Oman and the Middle East are facing. Moreover, pandemic situation of COVID-19 anxiety impacts everyone especially business and industry which leads to increased unemployment rate and job losses for many employees. However, this brings attention of new graduate students and their perceptions regarding getting jobs.

**Corresponding Author:**  
**Uzma Jahan**  
Department of Business  
Studies, College of Economics  
and Business Administration,  
University of Technology and  
Applied Sciences, Muscat,  
Sultanate of Oman, Oman

This category of the students can be the most group to be affected in this situation because there are least options available where they can fulfill their needs since there is a decline in job opportunities in the business industry. All this has caused them in the job search behavior because of worrying about their future, how to build themselves in such perilous time. The new graduate is affected a lot because they are worried and working hard to get a chance of work in any place, it is still a challenge to them because of lack of opportunity to have a job. The candidates who are waiting for a job must be more motivated and do not lose faith for looking for any job. However, many of the students in the colleges are preparing to leave because they see fewer chances to get a job. A lot of students feel less confident to have a job after graduation. According to some statistical report, in Oman by the end of November 2018, the number of job seekers reached 45,711, of whom 17,272 were males and 28,439 were females. However, nowadays the job searchers have increased causing fire existing employees. In addition, the problem of new graduate students still has not been solved; surely everyone is looking for a job and they become job searchers, and this will lead to more and more of work searchers.

We all know that COVID-19 anxiety has negatively affected the country's economy and society, whether they are teachers, pilots, doctors, or whatever their job is. With the increase in cases of COVID-19 and it is approaching half a million patients and caused tremendous economic pressure in the country, which led to the loss of many jobs. As the number of citizens who applied for unemployment benefits at the end of November reached 45,711 people. The COVID-19 epidemic has affected the labor markets greatly, which has caused many problems such as malnutrition, poor living and increased pressure on private business sectors that may have to close their businesses and lay off their employees and workers. A COVID-19 experience that is diagnosed or known to someone who was suffered or died due to it is likely to cause great stress and significantly get affected health and well-being. People had a psychological impact as well that could lead to health consequences in addition to psychological stress (Gallagher *et al.*, 2020) <sup>[21]</sup> However, the greatest impact was on the graduate students, most of them at this time lost hope of obtaining jobs and were very anxious about their future, which makes them less confident in themselves, leading to a significant increase in unemployment rates in the country. There are those who lost their jobs because of the committee's decisions regarding the closure of some activities. Because of the pandemic situation, graduate students could think of opening their own business or joining online courses to gain more experience (Bhat *et al.*; 2021) <sup>[11]</sup>.

However, the impact of COVID-19 anxiety on job search behavior among the new graduate students is become one of trending topic nowadays in the field of human resources and the people who are fresh graduates and searching for a job. In Oman, due to the last few years the problem of unemployment is increasing, and while the COVID-19 is showing the problem of finding the job become so difficult to the government. However, the new graduate students these days feel so scared of not having a job because of the pandemic impact and difficulties that they faced. The problem which the new graduate faced is the recruitment chances become less than before, as the pandemic has changed everything and made the companies think a lot

before hiring any of new candidates. Also, it may increase the level of unemployment in the country.

The new graduate students even with the COVID-19 anxiety are facing a lot of challenges while they search for a job. The level of stress and depression kept on increasing with the new graduate students around the world. Also, the COVID-19 builds in them the feeling of uncertainty and anxiety as the situation they face now make them feel that nothing will change. This research aims to focus on the new graduate students from the University of Technology and Applied Science and to develop new knowledge by bringing deep understanding of the issue in the University. The purpose of this empirical analysis is to investigate how graduate students' job seeking behavior and anxiety levels are related. This study intends to provide light on how graduate students might more effectively manage their job search process during the epidemic by investigating how anxiety affects job search tactics. The research's conclusions will be valuable for career. However, pandemic highly impacts potential candidates from a business perspective of the COVID-19 situation is the way they follow in the work. Moreover, the objective of this study is to provide valuable insights to scholars and researchers who are interested in work searchers or job seekers worldwide, with a specific focus on the Sultanate of Oman. By studying this report, job seekers will gain knowledge on effective job search strategies and obtain valuable advice on securing employment in their respective fields. Additionally, they will gain a deeper understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on businesses and companies.

Furthermore, this study highlights the potential benefits for students who have recently graduated during the COVID-19 pandemic. As many employees have been laid off during the pandemic, there will likely be increased demand for new employees after the anxiety subsides. This will present new job opportunities for recent graduates, as the workload will likely increase while the number of available employees decreases.

### Literature review

Anxiety is a normal emotion. This is a way your brain responds to stress and warns of possible dangers. Everyone is restless from time to time. Also, Stress can be defined as any change that causes physical, emotional, or psychological stress. Your body's response to anything that requires attention or action is stress (Bhat, M. A. (2013) <sup>[13-14]</sup>. Everyone has some level of stress. However, how you respond to stress can go a long way towards your overall well-being. Living with anxiety disorders can be difficult and frustrating. Constant worry and fear can make you feel tired and scared. If you tell your doctor about your symptoms, you have taken the first step to get rid of your worries (Hansa, 2020) <sup>[23]</sup>. It can take a while to find the right treatment. If you have more than one anxiety, you may need multiple treatments. For most people with anxiety, medication and counseling are the best combination. With proper care and treatment, you can learn to manage your symptoms and be successful (Hansa, 2020) <sup>[23]</sup>.

Work search behavior is a task-oriented action in which job search behavior is activated in order to achieve the goal. According to previous studies, the aspirations of younger and older people vary from one time to another or one situation to another which also may result in various types

of anxiety depending on the situation. The objectives change from an extrinsic performance-oriented pattern to an intrinsic mastery-related pattern as people get older (Bhat, M. A., & 2022) <sup>[12]</sup>. There is new career, remaining aware, building a network, and gaining influence are all examples of job search goals. Employment search strategies refer to how people go about looking for work and achieving their objectives.

### COVID-19 anxiety

During the COVID-19 pandemic, and the lockdown which remained for a long time during the year 2020, 20.4% of the new graduates faced a lot of problems with high anxiety level (Sundarasan *et al.*, 2020) <sup>[45]</sup>. Online mode of studying affected which made them worried about their grades while graduating from the colleges and they became concerned about their future plans. The results from the study conducted by Cao *et al.* (2020) <sup>[17]</sup>, show that the new graduates became more stressed. This could lead to see the people losing faith with increasing level of anxiety. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a lot of anxiety and uncertainty, especially for college students. However, these feelings are not new thing for graduate students. (2018, study in journal Nature biotechnology) recognize that “graduate students are likely to have anxiety and depression about more than 6 times compared to normal population.

Anxiety has become one of the biggest fears and stress reasons among different kinds of people and especially for the student when they start real-world life. Moving from students to employee is one of the difficult moments in one’s life of adulthood. This movement in this stage can be expected or not and its affects relationships, roles, assumptions, and routines. This is also creating new attitudes and behavior among the individual who have difficulty in life changing. (Aucejo, *et al.*; 2020) <sup>[6]</sup>. Fear and anxiety start when the person starts to know things not under his comfort zone scope, and this brings changing, and the person should know that he requires to be able to move smoothly with this changing situation (Bhat *et al.* 2019) <sup>[10]</sup>.

This mental illness may affect the students directly on the level of their motivation, concentration, and social interaction, and it is one of the critical factors responsible for the success of the students in higher education (Unger, 2007) <sup>[47]</sup>.

The results of the existing study shows that people who have financial problem are closer to have risk of developing psychological distress (Wang *et al.*, 2020a). The rise in unemployment and the unpredictability link with helplessness of a COVID-19 pandemic has been observed to impact on mental health of individuals (Alradhawi *et al.*, 2020; Konstantakopoulos *et al.*, 2019; Sood, 2020) <sup>[2, 29, 44]</sup>. Along with the socio-cultural context, the role performed by ‘breadwinner’ in the Omani societies is normally defined clearly. The ‘breadwinner’ is expected to provide the family with different facilities to satisfy their needs. This could become a source of stress, especially at the time when the unemployment rate is increased in the country because more and more job seekers will be dependent over their families and the society as well.

### Job search behavior during COVID-19 Pandemic

COVID-19 causes deep and dangerous impacts in the global economy. Various countries over the world applied reports

about the increasing level of unemployment. There is fear regarding this changing unemployment rate that could have a serious impact on the younger population. This study explains how changes in economic conditions will affect graduate recruitment in different countries around the world. The graduate market reflects the wider problem in the economy. Since graduates mostly runs from bad impact of recessions, health and length of graduate’s labor market linked to wider economy. (Ganson, K. T., et.al, (2021) <sup>[22]</sup>. The size of the current issue means it will affect workers from different skill levels and it led to difficulty for those who enter labor market for the first time. The recruitment of new graduates decreased everywhere. During the year 2020, a lot of employers take steps to decline or delay number of recruiting graduates. Moreover, this led to a reduction in overall job numbers in all the countries who participated in the study in formal graduate labor market. The new graduate’s market will not recover directly. By looking to next year, the expectation of 15 countries is that graduates’ recruitment volume will continuously decrease. Since there are only three countries (Canada, New Zealand and South Africa) whose expectation is stability of the market and other three countries (UAE, Poland and Belgium) expect growth. People believe in uncertainty; the respondents say that their loss of certainty in how transition of graduates will work, and this makes the planning so difficult to find various ideas and solution regarding this issue. People with more avoidant attachments had lower job search intentions, lower personal job search efficiency, and more negative job search attitudes. (Rajkumar, R. P., 2020) <sup>[42]</sup>.

Large-scale macro events (e.g., recessions) can influence jobseeker expectations, according to a limited but significant literature, (Wanberg, Ali and Csillag, 2020) <sup>[48]</sup>. They say further research on context (macroeconomic conditions) is required to provide deeper and richer insight into the predictors and moderators involved in job search success in their thorough analysis of the job search literature. The authors conclude that more research on macroeconomic conditions is needed to provide a richer insight in the job-search success of jobseekers. The aim of this article is to see if the emergences of the COVID-19 pandemic changed job search behavior over time. We show that the onset of the pandemic triggers a major change in job search behavior towards jobs that require less physical contact. The findings also have practical consequences, such as assessing whether or not providing work-from-home opportunities is worthwhile, and better understanding the impact of macro events in general.

### Relationship between COVID-19 anxiety and job search behavior

The epidemic is critical because it has both financial and health implications. As a result, criticality is particularly important for determining which habits are most likely to be influenced by the case. Morgeson *et al.* (2015) <sup>[35]</sup> noted, “The more significant an event is, the more likely it is to appear prominent and require attention and unusual actions.” We claim that behavior affects financial well-being and physical health is work related in the case of a pandemic; therefore, this occurrence is likely to impact your job quest. Considering that most recent research on macro events has not looked at the event’s immediate impact (i.e. at the start), there’s still a lot to learn about how the COVID-19 pandemic shapes job search behavior and how macro events

affect job search in general. (McFarland, L. A., *et al.*, 2020)<sup>[32]</sup>.

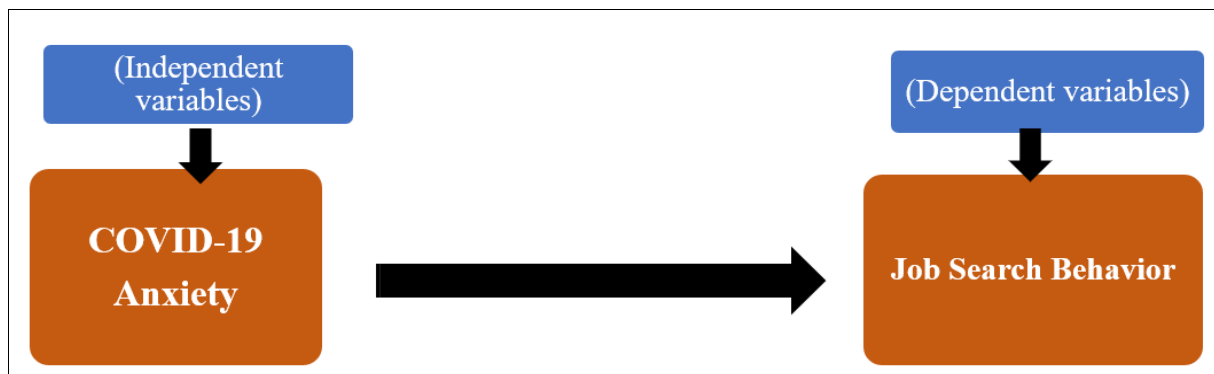
Since COVID-19 appears in the world creates different problems in different aspects but the major impact is to increase level of anxiety, stress and depression especially among new graduate students and job seekers. (Chowdhury, U., 2022)<sup>[16]</sup>. However, the impact of COVID-19 has significant effect on them because the rate of unemployment starts to increase over the whole world. Unemployment is the main reason and play major threat over the health of unemployed individuals (Paul & Moser, 2009)<sup>[39]</sup> which is linked with the depression and anxiety (McKee-Ryan *et al.*, 2005)<sup>[33]</sup>. Job search behavior concept is like psychological stress process for the unemployed individual and his family and translated as poor health and uncertainty. There are different studies, which proved that there is a link between unemployment and mental health of the individual and it results in stress and depression (Morgeson *et al.*, 2015)<sup>[35]</sup>. (Alte and Villa 2020)<sup>[3]</sup> state that the mental health of unemployed individual is weaker than the others who have a job. Moreover, various models tried to identify the relationship between the health and unemployment; few explain moving from one stage to another (Bandura, 1997)<sup>[8]</sup>, on the other hand others talk about losses and merits of having job like financial needs (Jahoda, 1981, Warr, 1987)<sup>[27, 49]</sup> or identity change and behavior through indirect way (Ezzy, 1993)<sup>[19]</sup>. Whereas, (Montgomery *et al.* (1999)<sup>[50]</sup> says that recent unemployment takes full responsibilities regarding anxiety and depression symptoms.

Kanfer and Hulin (1985)<sup>[28]</sup>, see that the people who find a

job are more confident than the people who are unemployed and are just laid off from their job. Increased levels of trust will help the situation, while increased status will help the situation. Individuals view the condition as less severe. As a result, anxiety symptoms decrease. Considering that the negative experience of unemployment or the positive experience of having a job may have a causal relationship, self-efficacy results (Bandura, 1997)<sup>[8]</sup> as well as mental wellbeing Provided the causal relationship (Paul & Moser, 2009)<sup>[39]</sup> between self-efficacy and mental health (Bandura, 2000)<sup>[8]</sup>. "The more critical the case, the more likely it will be seen as significant and require special consideration and action" (Morgeson *et al.*, 2015)<sup>[35]</sup>. As a result, criticality is particularly necessary when deciding which behaviors are most likely to be influenced by a situation that could impact job search.

The COVID-19 anxiety is influencing the world's healthcare and economy. Employees and companies alike are concerned with how to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic (Alte and Villa 2020)<sup>[3]</sup>, which has resulted in high unemployment and the loss of many jobs. In addition, the effect of the epidemic's emergence was experienced more keenly by new graduate students, who experienced a reduction in their chances of finding jobs. It created a big challenge in their job-search behavior, leaving them very concerned about their future and forcing them to emerge at a critical time. However, the impact of COVID-19 anxiety on job search behavior among new graduate students is an imperative topic.

### H1: There is positive relationship between COVID-19 anxiety and job search behavior



**Fig 1:** Conceptual framework

The research went through something new to identify more aspects that get effect by COVID-19. An example of previous study that focused on depression and stress relationship with job seeker has focused to clarify and examine the status of mental health in adult job seekers and to find different factors related to job searching depression, stress and suicide perspective. Moreover, how this came to be major factor, therefore there should be identification of essential impact of stress and depression over suicidal ideation and job seekers' stress relationship (Ah Young Lim *et al.*, 2018)<sup>[30]</sup>.

There are many variables being explored that are linked to the impact of COVID-19 but this study went through the two significant variables which will provide more information regarding the topic (Anxiety and Job search behavior). On the other hand, many studies missed out to

identify or explain the relationship between different factors that will be determined in this study because there will be identification of the relationship between anxiety and job search behavior from different angles and aspects as well to understand the deep relationship between them and how they can affect each other Bhat, M. A. (2023)<sup>[15]</sup>. Moreover, the pandemic of COVID-19 has never happened before and the entire situation in Oman and Muscat city could be covered through this study in terms of all the effects regarding the topic of the study to reach the objective by covering all the available information. The study will be focusing on new graduate students.

### Research Methodology

#### Sample and Data Collection Procedures

A simple Random Sampling technique was used to collect



data from among new graduates students in the University of Technology and Applied Science, Muscat, Sultana of Oman. Regarding the sample size, the number of respondents is 162 students (mixed gender) from University of Technology and Applied Science. We created a Google form online to create the questionnaire. The responses were collected in March/April 2021 to collect the information regarding various aspects of the present study.

### Sample Characteristics

**Table 1:** Description of the Respondents

Department				
Specialization	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
IT	23	14.2	14.2	14.2
Business	68	42.0	42.0	56.2
Engineering	65	40.1	40.1	96.3
Science	6	3.7	3.7	100.0
Total	162	100.0	100.0	
Age				
20-22	44	27.2	27.2	27.2
23-25	89	54.9	54.9	82.1
26-28	16	9.9	9.9	92.0
above 28	13	8.0	8.0	100.0
Total	162	100.0	100.0	
Gender				
Male	83	51.2	51.2	51.2
Female	79	48.8	48.8	100.0
Total	162	100.0	100.0	
Occupation				
Job Seeker	127	78.4	78.4	78.4
Employee	35	21.6	21.6	100.0
Total	162	100.0	100.0	
Education Qualifications				
Diploma	37	22.8	22.8	22.8
Bachelor	116	71.6	71.6	94.4
Other	9	5.6	5.6	100.0
Total	162	100.0	100.0	

It's clear in Table 1 that Business and engineering departments takes the highest number of participants with the percentage of 42% and 40.1% respectively. On the other hand, IT department participants were only 23 (14.2%). While the Science department takes the lowest percentage of participants which is 6 % only. A majority of graduates (55%) are between the age group of 23-25. The second highest number of respondents (27%) are from 20-22 age group. On the other hand, 10% respondents' age is in the range of 26-28. However, the lowest number of students (8%) is above 28. The number of males (51%) is higher than the number of females (49%) by a slight difference. The job seekers take the lead over the employees by 92 participants (78.4%). On the other hand, the employees were only 35 participants (21.6%). In terms of qualification, the bar chart gives information that the highest number of respondents (72%) are from Bachelor level, while a number of participants hold a Diploma degree (22.8%). However, a small number of respondents have another degree (5.6%).

### Research Instrument

**COVID-19 Anxiety:** We have adopted the scale of Sherman A. Lee (2020) [43] for this study that has items like

“Due to outbreak of COVID19, you face difficulty in sleep” After knowing about COVID19, you lose interest in variety of food intake, etc. All responses are recorded using a 5-point scale ranging from 1= “Strongly disagree” to 5= “strongly agree”.

**Job Search Behavior:** We have adopted the scale of Megeirhi *et al.* (2020) [34] for this study covering items like “you spent much of time seeking for job opportunities” and “you dedicate a lot of effort to searching for a job”, “after knowing about employment difficulties in COVID-19, I prepared/revised my CV etc.” The scale through which the respondents expresses their opinion whether they agree or disagree, to evaluate the objectives were started from 1= “Strongly disagree” to 5= “Strongly agree”.

### Reliability and Validity

Construct reliability was tested via Cronbach's Alpha. Values  $\geq .70$  indicate good reliability (Nunnally, 1970; O'Leary-Kelly and Vokurka, 1998) [36, 37] and values  $\geq .70$  suggest that the scales are relatively accurate for all constructs. The scale items were adopted from the existing scales, and only wording and content modifications were made to suit the context. Some items were kept in a negative form in order to have an internal cross-check and to ensure the active participation of the respondents while completing the questionnaire. The Appendix 1 shows full scales used for the understudy constructs.

### Common Method Variance

In nature, the data collected were self-reporting, which can cause Common Method Bias problem (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003) [41]. Therefore, to reduce this issue, procedural remedies were undertaken to prevent the inclusion of these prejudices, that is, to protect the confidentiality of respondents and to reduce the ambiguity of items. To examine Common Method Bias for all constructs in the study through common latent factor method (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003) [41]. The results of the common method variance explained that there is no item, the difference being greater than 0.20 (as recommended by Gaskin (2012a)). Thus, no single major factor emerged to account for a majority of the variances explained by the model, providing preliminary evidence that there is no significant Common Method Bias in the data (Henseler *et al.* (2016) [24].

### Measurement models

For this study, statistical analysis and hypotheses were tested using Structural Equation Modeling by performing partial least squares (PLS) analysis. Analysis was done using Smart PLS software version 3.0 to accurately provide an assessment of the reliability, convergence and discriminatory validity of the measurement model. PLS algorithms were run to determine the significance levels of the loadings, weights and path coefficients, followed by bootstrapping (5000 re-sample) and to determine the significance levels of the proposed hypotheses. Following the procedure suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) [5], the validity of the measurement model was estimated before testing the structural relationships outlined in the structural model and results showed adequate model fit as shown in Figure 1, all the indices were within the prescribed limit.

**Table 2:** Results of Convergent validity

Constructs	Items	Mean	SD	Path Estimates*	CA	rho_A	CR	(AVE)	CA	JSB
COVID-19 Anxiety	CA1	3.89	0.98	0.807	0.928	0.931	0.943	0.702	0.838	
	CA2	3.54	1.26	0.861						
	CA3	3.76	1.01	0.702						
	CA4	4.11	1.23	0.868						
	CA5	3.56	1.44	0.872						
	CA6	3.22	1.32	0.861						
	CA7	3.12	1.24	0.882						
Job Search Behavior	JSB1	3.45	1.11	0.837	0.917	0.919	0.938	0.751	0.708	0.867
	JSB2	3.98	1.23	0.821						
	JSB3	3.77	1.09	0.893						
	JSB4	3.49	1.07	0.888						
	JSB5	3.11	1.05	0.892						

**Key:** CA1-CA7: COVID-19 Anxiety, JSB1-JSB5: Job Search Behavior, AVE: represents Average Variance Extracted and CR represents Composite Reliability, CA: Cronbach's Alpha,

There are a high number of respondents that become worried and restless when exposed to even normal health issues (3.25). Most of the graduate students ignore discussing about COVID-19 as it makes them feel worried and depressed (3.06). However, the lowest number of respondents agrees that they feel dizzy while listening to news regarding COVID-19 (3.03). Moreover, there is a similarity that most students are afraid of death due to COVID-19 (2.89). While there is a slight difference between students who lose interest in variety of food intake after knowing about COVID-19 (2.65) and between those who become worried and restless when exposed to even normal health issues.

As for JSB statements, the highest respondents were searching for jobs through the internet because of the pandemic situation (3.73) while, 3.62 percent of the respondents had spent much of time for seeking for job opportunities and dedicate a lot of effort while searching for a job. Conversely, only 3.07 per cent of respondents are reading various job advertisements in magazines and newspaper publication.

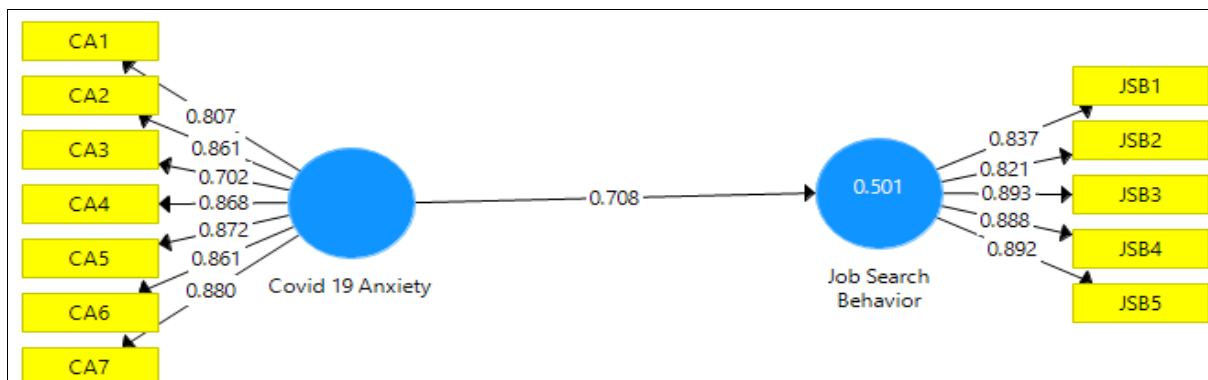
**Convergent validity**

Convergent validity was assessed by examining factor loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and composite reliability for each construct (Bagozzi and Phillips, 1991) [7]. Factor loadings have been used to test whether items in the construct stand at 0.5 or higher, and ideally 0.70 are significant factors loadings. AVE should be  $\geq 0.50$ , Composite reliability should be  $\geq 0.70$  to indicate adequate convergence and Table 2 reveals that all items have higher factors loadings. The examination of the Factor Loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Composite

Reliability (CR) of the all-understudy variables indicate that overall measurement scale has enough reliability. Therefore, it could be considered valid and reliable. Furthermore, the discriminant validity of the measuring model was determined by comparing the Average Extracted Variances with the squared correlation between constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) [20]. If the square root of the Average Variance Extracted is larger than the correlation coefficients, this is achieved to test this (Malhotra & Dash, 2011). From the Table 3, all AVEs for the constructs are higher than squared inter-construct correlations. The results provide rich evidence of discriminant validity.

**Analysis and Results**

The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis was used to test the hypotheses in the conceptual model, using different regression analyzes. A bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 iterations was performed to examine the statistical significance of the path coefficients (Jakobsen and Jensen 2015) [25]. The PLS does not generate overall goodness-of-fit indices (GoF). Instead, Henseler *et al.* (2016) [24] recommended applying the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) as the appropriate model fit criterion. The recommended value of 0.08 or less is adequate for the PLS path analysis model. For this study, a value of 0.054 for SRMR was observed, signifying an acceptable model fit. The structural model includes exogenous latent variables (independent variables) namely, COVID-19 Anxiety and Job Search Behavior as endogenous latent variable (dependent variable). Assessing the concordance of model to the underlying data, the results are shown in Figure 2.



**Note:** CA1-CA7: COVID-19 Anxiety, JSB1-JSB5: Job Search Behavior

**Fig 2:** Structural model

The analysis followed the conceptual framework and assumptions that improved the study, it also finds the relationship between the two factors COVID-19 anxiety and Job search behavior ( $r = .708$  sig. = .000) However, the p-value of significance is lower than the acceptable range of 0.05 ( $p = .95$ ) which proposes that the COVID-19 anxiety is a significant predictor of job search behavior thus accepting H1 of this research.

### Conclusion and Discussion

The empirical analysis conducted in this study aimed to explore the relationship between anxiety and job search behavior among graduate students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results indicated that anxiety has a significant impact on job search behavior, with COVID-19 anxiety being an important indicator. The findings of this study highlight the challenges faced by graduate students who are searching for a job during the pandemic and the need for support from career counselors, employers, and policymakers.

The results also revealed that the number of job seekers who fear COVID-19 is less than employees, which suggests that job seekers are more concerned with finding a job than with the fear of contracting COVID-19. However, the number of job seekers with a master's degree is higher than those with a diploma, indicating that those with higher qualifications are facing more challenges in finding a job during the pandemic. This highlights the need for targeted support for these individuals.

The analysis also revealed that the percentage of males searching for work was higher than the percentage of females, which is consistent with previous research. However, there were only slight differences between males and females in terms of being affected by COVID-19 anxiety when searching for a job.

In nutshell, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the job search behavior of graduate students, with anxiety playing a crucial role. The findings of this study have important implications for career counselors, employers, and policymakers, who need to provide targeted support to those who are struggling to find a job during these challenging times. Further research is needed to explore the impact of other factors, such as socioeconomic status, on job search behavior during the pandemic.

### Recommendations and Suggestion

Because of COVID-19 situation, the fresh graduate students are facing a lot of challenges while they search for a job. The situation that they are facing it now makes them feel that nothing will change and never expect any update. The research aims to develop new knowledge by bringing deep understanding of this issue. The level of the stress and depression kept increasing with the new graduate students around the world. It may increase the level of unemployment in the country. The respondents in the present study seem to be experienced with the problems regarding the impact of COVID-19 Anxiety on Job search behavior. Based on the findings, we recommend the students and the new graduates not to feel worried because of the current situation. We advise new graduates not to worry too much because of the current conditions, but rather the situation will improve and there will be many job opportunities. Overall, we recommend the new graduate student to focus more in searching a job in any way,

whether online or through an interview, and we advise them not to give up and not to change in job search behavior. We recommend the companies to give more job opportunities to benefit both side (employee and the company). We also ask the government to pay more attention to the previous context, for example, forcing some companies to increase the number of employees and employ them permanently, because this will help in reducing the number of unemployment and will also benefit companies economically.

### Research implications

The findings of the empirical analysis on the relationship between anxiety and job search behavior among graduate students during the COVID-19 pandemic have several implications. Firstly, career counselors need to develop targeted strategies and support programs to assist graduate students in managing their anxiety and improving their job search behavior during the pandemic. This could include offering virtual counseling sessions, providing resources and guidance on effective job search strategies, and developing programs to help students build resilience and coping skills.

Secondly, employers need to be aware of the challenges faced by graduate students during the pandemic and consider implementing flexible recruitment policies and practices. This could include providing virtual interviews, offering remote work options, and being open to considering applicants who have taken career breaks or experienced job loss due to the pandemic.

Lastly, policymakers need to recognize the impact of the pandemic on the job market and the unique challenges faced by graduate students. They should develop policies that support the workforce during these challenging times, such as providing financial assistance to those who are struggling to find employment and implementing training and reskilling programs to help individuals transition to new jobs or industries.

Overall, the findings of this study highlight the need for a coordinated and collaborative effort from career counselors, employers, and policymakers to support graduate students in their job search during the COVID-19 pandemic. By providing targeted support and implementing policies that promote resilience and adaptability, we can help to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the workforce and ensure that graduate students have the necessary skills and resources to succeed in their careers.

### Limitation and future direction of study

The study was conducted using a cross-sectional survey design, which limits our ability to establish causality. We cannot determine whether anxiety leads to poor job search behavior or whether poor job search behavior leads to anxiety. Future studies could consider using longitudinal designs to address this limitation. Future, the sample used in this study was limited to graduate students, which may not be representative of the wider population of job seekers during the pandemic. The study did not include other groups, such as those with lower levels of education or those who have been out of work for an extended period, which may have different experiences and challenges.

Furthermore, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to response bias. Participants may have underreported or overreported their anxiety or job search behavior, which could impact the validity of the findings.

Lastly, the study did not consider other potential factors that could influence job search behavior, such as the availability of jobs in specific industries or locations. Future studies could consider these factors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of the pandemic on job search behavior.

The present study provides future direction to explore the impact of different types of support programs and interventions on job search behavior and anxiety among graduate students. This could include comparing the effectiveness of virtual counseling sessions, job search workshops, and other forms of support.

Firstly, future research could examine the impact of the pandemic on different groups of job seekers, including those with lower levels of education or those who have been out of work for an extended period. Understanding the unique challenges faced by these groups could guide the development of targeted support and interventions.

Secondly, future studies could explore the impact of other contextual factors, such as the availability of jobs in specific industries or regions, on job search behavior and anxiety during the pandemic.

Lastly, future research could investigate the longer-term impacts of the pandemic on the career trajectories of graduate students and other job seekers. Understanding how the pandemic has influenced career decisions and outcomes could guide the development of policies and programs to support the workforce in the post-pandemic era.

## References

1. Abel JR, Deitz R. Underemployment in the early careers of college graduates following the Great Recession. In *Education, skills, and technical change: Implications for future US GDP growth*; c2017. p. 149-181. University of Chicago Press.
2. Alradhawi M, Shubber N, Sheppard J, Ali Y. Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental well-being amongst individuals in society- A letter to the editor on The socio-economic implications of the coronavirus and COVID-19 pandemic: A review. *International journal of surgery (London, England)*. 2020;78:147-148. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijssu.2020.04.070>
3. Alte C, Villa L. *Psycnet*. March 2020. [http://psycnet.apa.org/org/full\\_text/2020-74077-001.pdf](http://psycnet.apa.org/org/full_text/2020-74077-001.pdf)(accessed March 18,2021).
4. Anjum A. An analysis of the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the recruitment and selection practices & talent acquisition of Bangladesh Japan IT (BJIT) Limited; c2022.
5. Anderson JC, Gerbing DW. Structural equation modeling in practice: A review and recommended two-step approach. *Psychological bulletin*. 1988;103(3):411.
6. Aucejo EM, French J, Araya MPU, Zafar B. The impact of COVID-19 on student experiences and expectations: Evidence from a survey. *Journal of public economics*. 2020;191:104271.
7. Bagozzi RP, Phillips LW. Assessing construct validity in organizational research. *Administrative Science Quarterly*. 1991;36(3):421-458. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2393203>
8. Bandura A. Exercise of human agency through collective efficacy. *Current directions in psychological science*. 2000;9(3):75-78.
9. Barclay SR. Schlossberg's transition theory. *College student development: Applying theory to practice on the diverse campus*; c2017. p. 23-34.
10. Bhat AM. Occupational stress pessimistic organizational commitment: a psychoeducational perspective. *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews*; c2019. p. 380-386.
11. Bhat MA, Khan ST, Rainayee RA. Assessment of perceived labor market conditions in employees' turnover intention model—mediation and moderation analyzes. *PSU Research Review*; c2021.
12. Bhat MA, Tariq S. Impact of Job Burnout on Performance: A Study among Hospital Employees of J&K, India; c2022.
13. Bhat MA. Occupational stress among bank employees: an empirical study. *IJSR-International Journal of Scientific Research*. 2013;2(1):169-170.
14. Bhat MA, Shah JA, Baba AA. A literature study on family business management from 1990 to 2012. *Journal of business and management*. 2013;7(6):60-77.
15. Bhat MA, Khan ST. Determinants of accounting students' decision to pursue career as ACCA-certified accountants: a case study of Omani students. *Management & Sustainability: An Arab Review*; c2023.
16. Chowdhury U, Suvro MAH, Farhan SM, Uddin MJ. Depression and stress regarding future career among university students during COVID-19 pandemic. *PLoS one*. 2022;17(4):e0266686.
17. Cao W, Fang Z, Hou G, Han M, Xu X, Dong J, *et al*. The psychological impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on college students in China. *Psychiatry research*. 2020;287:112934. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.112934>
18. Clarke Giles; c2020 Apr 8. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1061322> (accessed February 26, 2021).
19. Ezzy D. Unemployment and Mental Health: A Critical Review. *Social Science and Medicine*. 1993;37:41-52. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536\(93\)90316-V](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536(93)90316-V)
20. Fornell C, Larcker DF. Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error. *Journal of Marketing Research*. 1981;18(1):39-50. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3151312>
21. Matthew G, Zvolensky M, Long L, Roges A, Lorra Garey; c2020 Aug 29. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10608-020-10143-y#Abs1> (accessed February 26, 2021).
22. Ganson KT, Tsai AC, Weiser SD, Benabou SE, Nagata JM. Job insecurity and symptoms of anxiety and depression among US young adults during COVID-19. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 2021;68(1):53-56.
23. Hansa Bhargava D. Anxiety Disorders, Anxiety Disorders: Types, Causes, Symptoms, Diagnosis, Treatment (webmd.com); c2020.
24. Jörg H, Geoffrey H, Pauline R. Using PLS Path Modeling in New Technology Research: Updated Guidelines. *Industrial Management & Data Systems*. 2016;116:2-20. 10.1108/IMDS-09-2015-0382.
25. Jakobsen M, Jensen R. Common method bias in public management studies. *International public management journal*. 2015;18(1):3-30.
26. Jadhav V, Khanna M. Factors influencing online buying behavior of college students: A qualitative analysis. *The Qualitative Report*. 2016;21(1):1.



27. Jahoda M. Work, employment, and unemployment: Values, theories, and approaches in social research. *American psychologist*. 1981;36(2):184.
28. Kanfer R, Hulin CL. Individual differences in successful job searches following lay-off. *Personnel psychology*. 1985;38(4):835-847.
29. Konstantakopoulos G, Pikouli K, Ploumpidis Dimitri, Bougonikolou E, Kouyanou K, Maria N, *et al*. The impact of unemployment on mental health examined in a community mental health unit during the recent financial crisis in Greece. *Psychiatriki*. 2020;30:281-290. 10.22365/jpsych.2019.304.281.
30. Lim AY, Lee SH, Jeon Y, Yoo R, Jung HY. Job-seeking stress, mental health problems, and the role of perceived social support in university graduates in Korea. *Journal of Korean Medical Science*. 2018;33(19).
31. Ma Y, Zhao Y, Liu J, He X, Wang B, Fu S, *et al*. Effects of temperature variation and humidity on the death of COVID-19 in Wuhan, China. *Science of the total environment*. 2020;724:138226.
32. McFarland LA, Reeves S, Porr WB, Ployhart RE. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on job search behavior: An event transition perspective. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. 2020;105(11):1207.
33. McKee-Ryan F, Song Z, Wanberg CR, Kinicki AJ. Psychological and physical well-being during unemployment: a meta-analytic study. *Journal of applied psychology*. 2005;90(1):53.
34. Megeirhi HA, Ribeiro MA, Woosnam KM. Job search behavior explained through perceived tolerance for workplace incivility, cynicism and income level: A moderated mediation model. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*. 2020;44:88-97.
35. Morgeson Mitchell TR, Liu D FP; c2015. <https://psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/2020-74077-001.pdf> (accessed 3 12, 2021).
36. Nunnally Jr JC. Introduction to psychological measurement; c1970.
37. O'Leary-Kelly SW, Vokurka RJ. The empirical assessment of construct validity. *Journal of operations management*. 1998;16(4):387-405.
38. Otu A, Charles CH, Yaya S. Mental health and psychosocial well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic: The invisible elephant in the room. *International journal of mental health systems*. 2020;14(1):1-5.
39. Paul KI, Moser K. Unemployment impairs mental health: Meta-analyses. *Journal of Vocational behavior*. 2009;74(3):264-282.
40. Pennells L, Kaptoge S, Wood A, Sweeting M, Zhao X, White I, *et al*. Equalization of four cardiovascular risk algorithms after systematic recalibration: individual-participant meta-analysis of 86 prospective studies. *European heart journal*. 2019;40(7):621-631.
41. Podsakoff NP. Common method biases in behavioral research: A critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. 2003;885(879):10-1037.
42. Rajkumar RP. Attachment theory and psychological responses to the COVID-19 pandemic: a narrative review. *Psychiatria Danubina*. 2020;32(2):256-261.
43. Sherman A Lee. Coronavirus anxiety scale: A brief mental health screener for COVID-19 related anxiety, *Death Studies*; c2020. DOI: 10.1080/07481187.2020.1748481
44. Sood S. Psychological effects of the Coronavirus disease-2019 pandemic. *Research & Humanities in Medical Education*. 2020;7(11):23-26.
45. Sundarasan S, Chinna K, Kamaludin K, Nurunnabi M, Baloch GM, Khoshaim HB, *et al*. Psychological impact of COVID-19 and lockdown among university students in Malaysia: implications and policy recommendations. *International journal of environmental research and public health*. 2020;17(17):6206.
46. Tulsie; c2020 May 4. from <https://tulsie.nl/coronavirus-recruitment-impact/>
47. Unger K. Handbook on Supported Education: Providing Services for Students with Psychiatric Disabilities. Charleston, SC: Book Surge Publishing; c2007.
48. Wanberg CR, Ali AA, Csillag B. Job seeking: The process and experience of looking for a job. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*. 2020;7:315-337.
49. Warr P. Work, unemployment, and mental health. Oxford University Press; c1987.
50. Woodall WH, Montgomery DC. Research issues and ideas in statistical process control. *Journal of Quality Technology*. 1999;31(4):376-386.
51. Zuraidah Z, Rusliza Y, Juliana O, Asiah ON. The Effect of Health Knowledge, Nutrition Label Use and Attitude towards Nutrition Label on Healthy Food Choice among Malaysian Consumer. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*; c2019; 9. 10.6007/IJARBS/v9-i9/6467.
52. Zandifar A, Badrfam R. Iranian mental health during the COVID-19 epidemic. *Asian J Psychiatr*. 2020 Jun;51:101990. DOI: 10.1016/j.ajp.2020.101990. Epub 2020 Mar 4. PMID: 32163908; PMCID: PMC7128485.

### Appendix 1

**Note for Investigators:** The responses to all the questions in the present study are to be sought from new graduation students in UTAS only.

### Demographic Profile of the Respondents

#### Gender:

Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

**Education Qualification:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Age** \_\_\_\_\_

**Difference Department** \_\_\_\_\_

**Note for Enumerators:** Please tick mark the relevant box below against each statement, the degree of your agreement or disagreement with the questions by choosing the answer that best represents your choice.

Strongly disagree. (1)	Disagree (2)	Undecided (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
<b>Statements</b>				<b>Responses</b>
<b>COVID-19 Anxiety</b>				
CA1	You feel dizzy when you listen any news regarding covid19			
CA2	Due to outbreak of COVID-19, you face difficulty in sleep			
CA3	After knowing about COVID-19, you lose interest in variety of food intake			
CA4	You become worried and restless when exposed to even normal health issues			
CA5	Your heart palpitates fast when discussing COVID-19 with anyone			
CA6	You are afraid of your death due to COVID-19			
CA7	You usually ignore discussing about COVID-19 as it makes you feel worried and depressed			
CA8	You fear a lot while going outside to buy necessities.			
<b>Job search Behavior</b>				
JSB1	“You Spent much of time seeking for job opportunities” and “you dedicate a lot of effort to searching for a job.			
JSB 2	You searched for jobs through the internet because of the pandemic situation.			
JSB 3	I read various job advertisements in a magazine and newspaper publication.			
JSB 4	After knowing about employment difficulties in COVID-19, I prepared/revised my CV.			
JSB 5	You contact with your relatives and friends about possible potential job that can satisfy you.			
				1 2 3 4 5