

The Mediating Role of Intolerance to Uncertainty in the Effect of Conscientiousness Personality Trait on Anxiety about Unemployment

Sorumluluk Kişilik Özelliğinin İşsizlik Kaygısı Üzerindeki Etkisinde Belirsizliğe Tahammülsüzlüğün Aracı Rolü

ABSTRACT

This study's main goal is to investigate how the conscientiousness personality trait, one of the five-factor personality types, affects unemployment anxiety and how intolerance of uncertainty mediates this relationship. A total of 458 university students—114 men and 344 women—participated in the study. The results showed that while there was a positive correlation between the personality trait of conscientiousness and both intolerance of uncertainty and unemployment anxiety, there was no significant correlation between intolerance of uncertainty and unemployment anxiety. Using the path analysis approach with the JAMOVİ statistical program to evaluate the study's hypotheses, it was discovered that intolerance of uncertainty did not significantly mediate the effect of conscientiousness on unemployment anxiety ($b = .001$, $SE = .02$, $z = 0.09$, $p = .93$). This findings suggest that when facing concern about unemployment, those with a conscientious personality attribute do not show any specific degrees of tolerance in uncertain circumstances.

Keywords: University students, anxiety about unemployment, intolerance of uncertainty, conscientiousness

ÖZET

Bu çalışmada temel amaç beş faktör kişilik tiplerinden sorumluluk kişilik özelliğinin işsizlik kaygısı üzerindeki etkisinde belirsizliğe tahammülsüzlüğün aracılık rolünün incelenmesidir. Çalışmaya 114 Erkek ve 344 Kadın olmak üzere 458 üniversite öğrencisi katılmıştır. Elde edilen bulgulara göre sorumluluk kişilik özelliğiyle belirsizliğe tahammülsüzlük arasında ve sorumluluk kişilik özelliği ve işsizlik kaygısı arasında pozitif bir ilişki bulunmasına rağmen, belirsizliğe tahammülsüzlük ve işsizlik kaygısı arasında anlamlı bir ilişki bulunamamıştır. Çalışmanın hipotezlerini test etmek için yol analizi metodu ile JAMOVİ istatistik programı kullanılmış ve sorumluluk değişkeninin işsizlik kaygısı üzerindeki etkisinde belirsizliğe tahammülsüzlüğün aracılık rolünün anlamlı olmadığı görülmüştür, ($b = .001$, $SE = .02$, $z = 0.09$, $p = .93$). Bu sonuçla söylenebilir ki, sorumluluk kişilik özelliğine sahip bireylerin işsizlik kaygısı hissettiklerinde belirsiz olan durumlarda tahammül etme seviyelerinin herhangi bir etkisi söz konusu değildir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Üniversite öğrencileri, işsizlik kaygısı, belirsizliğe tahammülsüzlük, sorumluluk

INTRODUCTION

Around the globe, unemployment is still a major socioeconomic issue, and young people are more negatively impacted than adults (Yang et al., 2024). It is noteworthy that Turkey's high rates of youth unemployment have not significantly decreased over the years (Tansel, 2007). Despite Turkey's rapidly rising university graduation rate, young people's fear of unemployment after graduation is growing due to a lack of expansion in employment prospects (Dağlar, 2021). Similarly, compared to the general unemployment rate, youth unemployment is substantially higher across EU countries (Eurostat, 2022). Inadequate employment policies, a lack of encouragement for entrepreneurship, economic fluctuations, and an imbalance between education and employment are the primary reasons of youth unemployment (Topkaya, 2015). Overall, this notion is supported by the rise in the percentage of young people who are neither employed nor in school.

According to Ekiz A.İ. & Akçakaya (2025) and Drake & Wallach (2020), unemployment anxiety is closely linked to people's thoughts of uncertainty about the future and can result in psychological effects such feelings of inadequacy, pessimism, and loss of self-confidence. Researches indicate that the most prevalent kind of career

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concern, especially among college students, is not being able to obtain work (Gizir, 2005; Tekin T. & Korkmaz, 2016).

The impact of personality traits on career growth and work life has been the subject of numerous research. Conscientiousness is a key predictor of job performance, career fit, and employability, according to the majority of these research, which were carried out within the framework of the Five Factor Personality Theory (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Barrick et al., 2001). Nonetheless, it is clear that there aren't many studies that specifically and comprehensively address the connection between the characteristic of conscientiousness and unemployment fear.

Planning, self-control, goal-orientedness, and the ability to control one's behavior are all related to the personality trait of conscientiousness, which helps people develop more useful reactions to ambiguous circumstances (Çakan et al., 2024; Özen, 2016). According to Dağlar (2021), there is a claim that people who possess a high degree of conscientiousness are better able to control their anxiety levels and make more accurate assessments of possible risks. Moreover, some research has found a negative correlation between career anxiety and unemployment and the trait of conscientiousness (Kayadibi & Kirdök, 2020; Cuesta & Budria, 2017). The results in this area are inconsistent, nevertheless, as there are also a few studies that suggest the responsibility trait raises unemployment anxiety (Dağlar, 2021).

Intolerance of uncertainty is said to be another important factor that contributes to unemployment anxiety. Uncertainty refers to events that a person cannot predict based on their present knowledge and experience; intolerance of uncertainty characterizes the tendency to react to these situations with great anxiety, avoidance, and a sense of threat (Buhr & Dugas, 2002). Studies show a high correlation between intolerance of uncertainty and anxiety disorders, namely career stress (Carleton et al., 2012; Aktay & Bozkurt, 2023).

Studies on the association between intolerance of uncertainty and unemployment anxiety have also increased during the Covid-19 pandemic because to an increase in the feeling of uncertainty (Bavolar et al., 2023). Results show that unemployment anxiety significantly rises as intolerance to uncertainty grows (Bıkmaz & Akça-Yağan, 2020; Gokulakas, 2021).

The research has primarily discussed intolerance to uncertainty as a pathological risk factor, but there aren't many studies looking at this attribute in the general population or in combination with personality traits. In this regard, it seems that the personality characteristic of conscientiousness may contribute to encouraging people to act in uncertain circumstances and lowering unemployment-related anxiety (Deniz & Sümer, 2010). Thus, a significant gap in the literature will be filled by examining the links between conscientiousness, intolerance of uncertainty, and unemployment fear within a comprehensive framework.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Unemployment has a significant impact on persons' psychological well-being, self-perception, and social belonging, in addition to affecting their economic stability (Drake & Wallach, 2020). The process of entering the labour market, particularly for young people, is characterised by intense anxiety due to uncertainty, competition and limited employment opportunities. In this context, according to Ekiz, A. & Akçakaya (2025), unemployment anxiety is defined as a person's emotional reaction to perceived dangers and uncertainties around their present or prospective unemployed status.

Theoretical approaches emphasize the tight relationship between unemployment anxiety and individual characteristics, cognitive appraisal processes, and structural variables. The stress-coping theory of Lazarus and Folkman holds that people's reactions to stresses are determined more by their subjective evaluations than by the objective features of the situation. In this situation, an individual's personality structure and ability to manage uncertainty become critical components in determining their level of anxiety when unemployment is evaluated as an unpredictable life event with a low sense of control.

CONSCIENTIOUSNESS PERSONALITY TRAIT AND UNEMPLOYMENT ANXIETY

As to the Five-Factor Personality Theory, conscientiousness includes traits like self-discipline, planning, goal orientation, and feeling of obligation (McCrae & Costa, 2003). According to Barrick et al. (2001), people who exhibit high levels of conscientiousness are better able to create long-term objectives, foresee challenges, and modify their behavior accordingly.

Conscientiousness has been shown to have a protective effect on career adjustment, work performance, and academic accomplishment (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Kayadibi & Kirdök, 2020) in the literature. This characteristic helps people perceive the fear of unemployment as more manageable by enabling them to engage in a more organized, proactive, and solution-focused manner during their transition into the labor market. In the study by

Cuesta and Budría (2017), the personality characteristic of responsibility may serve as a factor that lessens anxiety related to unemployment.

However, some research also suggests that having a lot of responsibilities might make people feel anxious since it puts an unnecessary pressure on them and makes them feel like they need control (Dağlar, 2021). These contradictory results imply that certain psychological processes rather than direct influences may shape the relationship between the conscientiousness personality trait and unemployment anxiety.

INTOLERANCE of UNCERTAINTY and ANXIETY about UNEMPLOYMENT

As defined by Buhr and Dugas (2002), intolerance of uncertainty is characterized by extreme anxiety, avoidance, and a propensity to manage uncertain and unpredictable circumstances. People with a high level of intolerance to uncertainty experience more severe anxiety reactions when they are unemployed because it is a life event that naturally contains uncertainty about the future (Carleton et al., 2012).

Studies have shown an association between intolerance of uncertainty and career stress and anxiety related to unemployment (Bıkmaz & Akça-Yağan, 2020; Gokulakas, 2021). When faced with uncertainty, people put off taking action, put off looking for a job, and believe that threats are growing, all of which contribute to a vicious cycle that increases unemployment anxiety. As a result, one of the primary cognitive-emotional factors influencing unemployment anxiety is intolerance of uncertainty.

CONSCIENTIOUSNESS PERSONALITY TRAIT and INTOLERANCE TO UNCERTAINTY

Conscientiousness is regarded as a personality trait that improves planning, structure, and control perceptions in the face of uncertainty (Deniz and Sümer, 2010). Although, they are unable to entirely eliminate uncertainty, people with a high degree of conscientiousness are said to have more useful coping mechanisms (Geçgin & Sahranç, 2017).

Studies in the literature have demonstrated a negative correlation between the intolerance of uncertainty and the personality trait of conscientiousness (Cevizci & Yalçın, 2018). On the other hand, some research indicates that a propensity to assume too much conscientiousness could make people feel more uncertain (Sarıçam et al., 2014). This suggests that there may be a nonlinear relationship between the conscientiousness trait and intolerance of uncertainty.

PRESENT STUDY

A review of the literature reveals that while there are potentially significant relationships between the personality traits of conscientiousness, intolerance of uncertainty, and unemployment anxiety, there aren't many research that incorporate these factors into a single model. In this regard, it is said that the relation between the personality characteristic of conscientiousness and unemployment anxiety may be mediated or moderated by intolerance of uncertainty.

Within this theoretical framework, it can be shown that the impact of the personality characteristic of conscientiousness on unemployment anxiety is determined by individuals' ability to deal with uncertainty. Thus, the study aims to reveal how responsibility, a personality-based variable, affects unemployment anxiety through intolerance to uncertainty, a cognitive-emotional process.

This method may also help to explain the contradictory results seen in the literature about the relationship between unemployment anxiety and the personality attribute of conscientiousness. It is believed that individual variances in the degree of resistance to uncertainty may be the reason why responsibility decreases anxiety in some research while increasing it in others (Dağlar, 2021). Consequently, the basic psychological process that characterizes this link is identified as intolerance to uncertainty.

HYPOTHESES

It is expected in this study that the variable of intolerance to uncertainty would have an impact on the association between the personality trait of conscientiousness and unemployment anxiety. The theoretical model is depicted in Figure 1, and the hypotheses generated within the framework of the study are listed below.

H1: There is a statistically significant association between the conscientiousness personality trait and unemployment anxiety.

H2: There is a statistically significant association between the conscientiousness personality trait and intolerance to uncertainty.

H3: There is a statistically significant association between the unemployment anxiety and intolerance to uncertainty.

H4: The association between the personality trait of conscientiousness and unemployment anxiety is expected to be significantly mediated by intolerance of uncertainty.

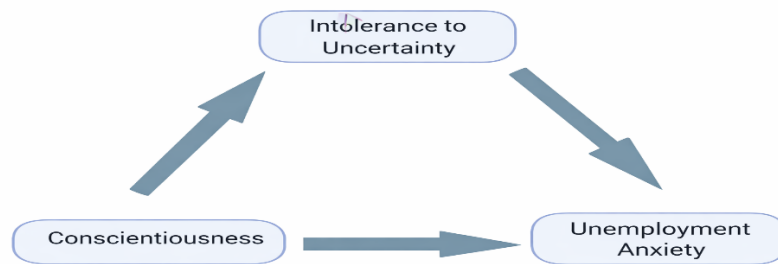


Figure 1: Mediation Model

METHOD

This study investigated the structural relationships between personality traits and psychological consequences using a quantitative research approach based on a correlational survey model. The Conscientiousness subscale of the Big Five Inventory, the Unemployment Anxiety Scale, and the Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale (IUS-12) were used to collect data. The direct and indirect effects of conscientiousness on unemployment anxiety levels were the focus of a path analysis using the JAMOVI statistical software to test the proposed mediation model.

PARTICIPANTS

458 people took part in the study. 344 women and 114 men took part in the study. On April 30, 2025, the Bingöl University Ethics Committee granted approval for the study with approval number 33117789/730.08/209490.

PROCEDURE

The set of research data was gathered online in May 2025. The data set's missing values, outliers, and extreme values were statistically assessed before the data analysis procedure. There were no outlier, irregular, or missing values found.

INSTRUMENTS OF MEASUREMENT

Intolerance to Uncertainty Scale: The BTÖ-12 Turkish form has been adjusted to its current state. The original form was developed in French with 27 items (Freeston et al. 1994). Because of the scale's factor instability and massive amount of items, Carleton and colleagues (2007) modified it once more. They determined the internal consistency score ($\alpha=.91$) after reducing the scale items to 12. In Turkey, the idea of intolerance to uncertainty is relatively new. Sarıçam and colleagues (2014) adapted the scale into Turkish due to the lack of research on this subject and its measurement as a sub-factor in assessment instruments. This scale was adapted into Turkish by Sarıçam et al. (2014), who reported a strong internal consistency ($\alpha=.88$). A 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), is used to build the 12 items in the Turkish version of the scale. The study's dependability coefficient was determined to be ($\alpha=.85$).

Unemployment Anxiety Scale: The scale, which consists of 12 psychometric items, was created by Ersoy and colleagues (2008) to measure university students' anxieties about unemployment. Scale items have a 5-point Likert-type evaluation and a rating from 1 to 5. Out of the twelve items on the scale, five are reverse-coded: items 1, 2, 3, 5, and 8. The assessment consists of the phrases 'I entirely agree', 'I mainly agree', 'I slightly agree', 'I mostly disagree', and 'I totally disagree'. The scale's internal consistency coefficient was found to be ($\alpha=.909$) by the analysis. Reliability was determined to be ($\alpha=.87$) in this study.

Conscientiousness Personality Scale: The conscientiousness scale was created by Mergler (2007) and translated into Turkish by Yaşaroğlu and associates (2018). After a process of limiting and reduction, the 100 items that made up Mergler's scale were reduced to 30 in response to the research that was done. The scale is a 5-point Likert scale, with item values of 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'somewhat agree', 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree'. The scale's internal reliability coefficient ($\alpha=.79$) indicates a reliable and valid structure. In this study yielded a reliability coefficient ($\alpha=.82$).

DATA ANALYSES

The statistical software package JAMOVİ was used to analyze the data collected for the purpose of this study. First, the main variables were summarized using descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations. The bivariate associations between conscientiousness, intolerance of uncertainty, and unemployment anxiety were examined using Pearson correlation analysis. Path analysis was used to ascertain the direct and indirect effects in order to test the proposed mediation model. Standardized coefficients and p-values were used to assess the mediation effect's significance; for all analyses, the statistical significance level was established at $p < .05$.

FINDINGS

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Preliminary analyses were carried out to look at the study variables' distributional characteristics and descriptive statistics before the primary analysis. The values for conscientiousness, intolerance of uncertainty, and unemployment anxiety were presented as mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis (Table 1).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

	<i>Conscientiousness</i>	<i>Uncertainty</i>	<i>Anxiety</i>
N	458	458	458
Mean	3.37	3.15	3.99
Standard deviation	0.634	0.704	0.486
Skewness	-0.690	-0.0438	-0.00440
Std. error skewness	0.114	0.114	0.114
Kurtosis	1.30	-0.464	-0.550
Std. error kurtosis	0.228	0.228	0.228

The personality trait of conscientiousness and intolerance to uncertainty have a significant positive association ($r = .39, p < .001$), according to the Pearson's correlation analysis (Table 2). This illustrates how people who possess a conscientiousness personality trait cannot tolerate uncertainty. In addition, no significant link was detected between intolerance to uncertainty and unemployment anxiety ($r = .05, p = .26$). As a result, it is clear that people's anxieties regarding unemployment do not represent their inability to deal with uncertainty. An additional findings showed that unemployment anxiety and having a conscientiousness personality were positively correlated ($r = .13, p = .006$). This incident verifies the assumption that people with a conscientiousness personality are likewise concerned about unemployment.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix

		<i>Conscientiousness</i>	<i>Uncertainty</i>	<i>Anxiety</i>
<i>Conscientiousness</i>	Pearson's r	-		
	df	-		
	p-value	-		
<i>Uncertainty</i>	Pearson's r	0.387***	-	
	df	456	-	
	p-value	<.001	-	
<i>Anxiety</i>	Pearson's r	0.128**	0.053	-
	df	456	456	-
	p-value	0.006	0.256	-

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

MEDIATION ANALYSIS

The path analysis used to evaluate the hypotheses of this study was carried out using the JAMOVİ program. The model's parameters (Table 3) revealed a positive and substantial relationship between conscientiousness and intolerance to uncertainty ($b = .43, SE = .05, z = 8.99, p < .001$). As a result, those who have a strong feeling of responsibility have demonstrated a high level of intolerance for uncertainty in their work. Additionally, unemployment anxiety was not predicted by intolerance of uncertainty ($b = .003, SE = .04, z = 0.09, p = .93$), but it was strongly predicted by the personality characteristic of conscientiousness ($b = .10, SE = .04, z = 2.51, p = .01$).

Table 3: Path Estimates

			Label	Estimate	SE	Z	p
Conscientiousness	→	Uncertainty	a	0.43008	0.0478	8.9899	<.001
Uncertainty	→	Anxiety	b	0.00297	0.0347	0.0856	0.932
Anxiety	→	Conscientiousness	c	0.09694	0.0386	2.5131	0.012

The impact of the conscientiousness variable on unemployment anxiety was not significantly mediated by intolerance to uncertainty, according to an analysis of indirect effects in the model (Table 4) ($b = .001$, $SE = .02$, $z = 0.09$, $p = .93$). Although there is a strong link between conscientiousness as a personality characteristic and intolerance to uncertainty, no link was identified between intolerance to uncertainty and unemployment anxiety. Therefore, even though responsible people find uncertainty intolerable, they do not experience unemployment anxiety as a result of this state of uncertainty.

Table 4: Mediation Estimates

Effect	Label	Estimate	SE	Z	p
Indirect	$a \times b$	0.00128	0.0149	0.0856	0.932
Direct	c	0.09694	0.0386	2.5131	0.012
Total	$c + a \times b$	0.09822	0.0356	2.7618	0.006

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND SUGGESTIONS

This study investigates the relationships between the personality trait of conscientiousness, tolerance to uncertainty, and fear of unemployment; it evaluates whether intolerance for uncertainty functions as a mediator in the interaction between conscientiousness and fear of unemployment. The evidence gathered is crucial for a deeper comprehension of the findings reported in earlier research and helps to thoroughly investigate the relationships between these variances in the literature.

Conscientiousness as a trait of personality was found to have a positive association with unemployment anxiety within the structure of the H1 hypothesis, and the data obtained showed that this relationship was statistically significant. This result is consistent with studies in the literature that assess conscientiousness as a factor that lowers career anxiety and unemployment (Cuesta & Budria, 2017; Kayadibi & Kırđök, 2020). However, it also contradicts data suggesting that a high level of conscientiousness may raise anxiety because of the performance pressure and expectations it puts on the individual (Dağlar, 2021). In this regard, it can be said that the personality characteristic of conscientiousness directly affects unemployment anxiety and is also reinforced by a number of psychological mechanisms.

The study's findings confirm hypothesis H2 by showing a strong and positive relationship between the personality characteristic of conscientiousness and intolerance to uncertainty. The findings implies that when presented with ambiguous situations, highly responsible people may be less tolerant of uncertainty and seek for control, order, and planning. The results corroborate research demonstrating that excessive conscientiousness and a strong desire for control can exacerbate feelings of uncertainty (Sarıçam et al., 2014), despite the literature's frequent trait that conscientiousness improves coping with uncertainty (Cevizci & Yalçın, 2018; Deniz & Sümer, 2010). Thus, it can be said that context and cognitive processes have an impact on the relationship between the personality trait of conscientiousness and intolerance to uncertainty.

Nevertheless, H3 is not supported. The study's findings indicate that there is no significant relationship between unemployment anxiety and intolerance to uncertainty. This result demonstrates that having uncertainty does not always lead to increased anxiety in uncertain situations. Given the intimate relationship between structural, economic, and social issues and concern over unemployment (Drake & Wallach, 2020), one could argue that comprehending this fear may require more than just analyzing one's own thought processes. Additionally, the fact that the sample's members were young and well-educated raises the possibility that they were not directly affected by unemployment, which could have prevented the uncertainty from developing into anxiety.

The H4 hypothesis, one of the study's primary objectives, is predicated on the notion that the relationship between the conscientiousness personality trait and unemployment anxiety will be mediated by intolerance to uncertainty. However, the results showed that this mediation link was not significant, indicating that intolerance to uncertainty

cannot account for the impact of conscientiousness on unemployment anxiety. This implies that intolerance to uncertainty may have low explanatory capacity in the typical human population and may be more closely associated with clinical levels of anxiety patterns in relation to unemployment anxiety (Carleton et al., 2012).

Nonetheless the model's overall effect of conscientiousness on unemployment anxiety is a noteworthy discovery, suggesting that other mediators or regulatory elements may have an impact on this relationship. Especially, it is expected that variables including job-finding skills, career fit, self-efficacy, and coping mechanisms will provide additional insight into the relationship between conscientiousness and unemployment anxiety. In this context, it can be argued that an individual's psychological and environmental resources determine whether the trait of conscientiousness results in successful or unsuccessful outcomes rather than an inability to deal with uncertainty.

In summary, this study shows that conscientiousness is a complicated and diverse personality trait that does not always provide protection against unemployment anxiety and intolerance to uncertainty. The findings suggest that more thorough, multi-variable models should be investigated in subsequent studies since single-variable models might not be sufficient to explain the connections between personality traits and career-related issues (Barmanpek & Steele, 2020; Barmanpek & Steele, 2021). Furthermore, because the sample consisted primarily of women and educated adults, future research should broaden their scope to include diverse parts of society in order to produce more effective and meaningful results.

Within the scope of the application, it was determined that unemployment anxiety should be investigated not only in terms of employment challenges, but also in terms of individual psychological traits. It is suggested that career support be set up in a way that fosters psychological flexibility because the relationship between the personality characteristic of conscientiousness and uncertainty indicates that this feature does not always provide protection.

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