10.22633/rpge.v29iesp3.20688

Revista on line de Política e Gestão Educacional
Online Journal of Policy and Educational Management

THE MEDIATING ROLE OF FUTURE ANXIETY IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STRESS AND INERTIA

O PAPEL MEDIADOR DA ANSIEDADE FUTURA NA RELAÇÃO ENTRE ESTRESSE E INÉRCIA

EL PAPEL MEDIADOR DE LA ANSIEDAD POR EL FUTURO EN LA RELACIÓN ENTRE EL ESTRÉS Y LA INERCIA

İbrahim ÇANKAYA[1]
i.cankayaa23@gmail.com

[1] Education Faculty, Uşak University, Uşak- Turkey. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Department of Education Sciences.

How to reference this paper:

Çankaya, İ. The mediating role of future anxiety in the relationship between stress and inertia. *Revista on line de Política e Gestão Educacional, 29*(esp3), e025071. https://doi.org/10.22633/rpge.v29iesp3.20688.

Submitted: 02/09/2025
Revisions required: 10/09/2025
Approved: 17/09/2025
Published: 27/11/2025

ABSTRACT: The aim of this study is to examine the mediating role of future anxiety in the relationship between stress and inertia levels among university students. The study is based on a correlational survey model. The working group consist of 480 final-year students enrolled at the Faculty of Education at Uşak University in Turkey during the spring semester of the 2024-2025 academic year. The scales of “stress,” “future anxiety,” and “inertia” available in the literature were used as data collection tools. The data were analyzed using SPSS 24 software. There is a meaningful and positive correlation between stress, future anxiety, and inertia. Between stress and inertia, future anxiety has a mediating effect. Future anxiety and stress inertia account for 18% of the variance. Inertia varies depending on concerns about the future.

KEYWORDS: Stress. Future anxiety. Inertia. Teacher candidate.

RESUMO: *O objetivo deste estudo é examinar o papel mediador da ansiedade futura na relação entre os níveis de estresse e inércia entre estudantes universitários. O estudo baseia-se num modelo de pesquisa correlacional. O grupo de trabalho é composto por 480 alunos do último ano matriculados na Faculdade de Educação da Universidade de Uşak, na Turquia, durante o semestre da primavera do ano letivo de 2024-2025. As escalas de "estresse", "ansiedade futura" e "inércia" disponíveis na literatura foram utilizadas como ferramentas de coleta de dados. Os dados foram analisados utilizando o software SPSS 24. Existe uma correlação significativa e positiva entre o estresse, a ansiedade em relação ao futuro e a inércia. Entre o estresse e a inércia, a ansiedade em relação ao futuro tem um efeito mediador. Future anxietyand stress inertia account for 18% of the variance. A inércia varia dependendo das preocupações com o futuro.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Estresse. Ansiedade em relação ao futuro. Inércia. Candidato a professor.*

RESUMEN: *El objetivo de este estudio es examinar el papel mediador de la ansiedad futura en la relación entre los niveles de estrés e inercia entre los estudiantes universitarios. El estudio se basa en un modelo de encuesta correlacional. El grupo de trabajo está formado por 480 estudiantes de último año matriculados en la Facultad de Educación de la Universidad de Uşak, en Turquía, durante el semestre de primavera del año académico 2024-2025. Las escalas de "estrés", "ansiedad futura" e "inercia" disponibles en la bibliografía se utilizaron como herramientas de recopilación de datos. Los datos se analizaron utilizando el software SPSS 24. Existe una correlación significativa y positiva entre el estrés, la ansiedad por el futuro y la inercia. Entre el estrés y la inercia, la ansiedad por el futuro tiene un efecto mediador. La ansiedad por el futuro y la inercia del estrés representan el 18 % de la varianza. La inercia varía en función de las preocupaciones sobre el futuro.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Estrés. Ansiedad por el futuro. Inercia. Candidato a maestro.*

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INTRODUCTION

Inertia comes from the Latin word for lazy and means slow behavior. Inertia refers to unused or untapped potential. Inertia, which means inaction, is explained in social sciences as a state of stagnation (Sekman & Utku, 2017). It is also used to describe inertia, slowness, failure to act, and delayed action (Sekman, 2009). According to Newton's law of inertia, every object remains in the same state of motion unless acted upon by an external force. For this reason, social scientists, unlike physicists, view inertia as a condition that hinders individual and organizational change (Huang et al., 2013). Inertia has a broad meaning, ranging from laziness, passivity, inaction, monotony, and slothfulness in the behavior of employees to spreading throughout the entire organization.

The main problem hindering change is inertia. The existence of inertia negatively affects the lives of individuals and institutions (Çankaya & Demirtaş, 2010). Inertia stems from individuals and institutions not changing as quickly as their social environment (Pfeffer, 1997). Routine actions, behavioral patterns, institutionalized structures, and bureaucracy create "mental habits" in individuals and institutions (Louis & Sutton, 1991). Innovation, thinking differently, and making different decisions are the opposite of inertia (Collinson & Wilson, 2006).

There are two important factors that increase inertia. One is low or excessive trust, and the other is stress and anxiety arising from uncertainty (Van der Steen, 2009). The sources of inertia can be categorized into two types: individual and organizational. According to Soysal (2010), the main reasons that cause individuals to fall into inertia include personality traits, procrastination, indifference, perfectionism, feelings of inadequacy, uncertainty, indecision, job dissatisfaction, fear of failure, and anxiety. There are beliefs and thoughts that cause inertia in individuals over time. Some of these are the idea of immutability, the idea of ineffectiveness, the idea of perfectionism, the idea of uselessness, the idea of procrastination, the idea of meaninglessness, the idea of lack of control, the idea of inadequacy, and future anxiety (Sekman, 2019).

Inertia is also affected by aimlessness, perfectionism, passive resistance, learned helplessness, physical inactivity, internal conflicts, ego, stress, and anxiety. Inertia manifests itself in three ways: personal, institutional, and social inertia. Despite their contrasting personality traits, both perfectionists and procrastinators are prone to inertia. Among the implicit factors that fuel inertia and need to be discussed are stress and constant anxiety (Sekman, 2019).

Stress

Stress is a sign of a perceived threat. Stress is everywhere and is biologically important because it helps us adapt quickly to changing conditions (Chen & Baram, 2016). The harmful effects of stress become apparent during critical developmental periods such as adolescence

10.22633/rpge.v29iesp3.20688

(Mancini et al., 2023). Negative experiences during adolescence increase the risk of stress--related mental disorders later in life. During adolescence, the quality of social interactions also changes as a result of spending more time with peers. Feelings of rejection become more common in people, and psychopathological conditions emerge during this period of life (Burke et al., 2017).

Most adolescents cannot cope with variable stressors and maintain their mental health on an ongoing basis. However, there is an acceleration in the stress process during adolescence, which indicates that many adolescents are at high risk (Roberts & Lopez-Duran, 2019). If stress is not managed effectively, it can lead to psychological and physical problems in the long term. According to Özer (2001), stress in adolescents can cause anxiety and inertia in the long term.

Future anxiety

Anxiety is seen as a fundamental structure that shapes character, and is sometimes considered an important factor in shaping personality and behavior (İşlek, 2016). In contrast, anxiety can cause a person to lose their sense of self and feel meaningless, leading to a continuous decline from life to death (Çakır, 2010). When looking at how it manifests in individuals, anxiety can be divided into two types: situational and persistent. People may experience anxiety only during the period of time when they are affected by certain events, or they may experience constant anxiety throughout their lives. Momentary anxiety is a subjective fear felt by a person in the moment.

Constant anxiety persists depending on the individual's predisposition to this condition and their perception of the situation they are in (Şanlı et al., 2016). Among adolescents, future anxiety is one of the most common types of anxiety. According to Zaleski (1996), future anxietyis defined as a state of worry, fear, anxiety, and uncertainty about unwanted changes in the distant future. The cognitive component of future anxietyis much stronger than its physiological and emotional components. An example of this cognitive component is when a person becomes preoccupied with negative thoughts about the future and perceives that they will be unable to cope with difficult situations. According to Hammad (2016), future anxiety involves the fear and perception of failure in achieving one's goals and desires. The effort to adapt to changing living conditions and control risks brings many responsibilities to individuals. According to Zaleski (1996), these responsibilities create tension in individuals, which is why all kinds of anxiety have a future dimension. It is quite difficult for people who are anxious about the future to develop a ready strategy for dealing with negative events they may encounter in the distant future.

There are many studies in the literature on future anxiety. These studies examined the effects of learned helplessness, depression, psychological resilience, and self-esteem on future anxiety (Bayrak, 2018; Demir, 2013; Dursun & Özkan, 2019; Özkan, 2023; Türk et al., 2022; Uyanık, 2023). In addition to these concepts, Bujnowska, Rodríguez, García, Areces, and Marsh (2019) examined the factors associated with future anxiety under three headings: A person's sensitivity to anxiety, how they evaluate their past experiences, and the current events they are experiencing. Some studies in the literature show that future anxiety is directly related to high stress, burnout, depression, and hopelessness, especially in adolescents. Burnout, depression, and hopelessness are considered to be factors that cause inertia (Sekman, 2019). By determining the extent to which future anxiety is related to inertia and its effect on inertia, the underlying causes of inertia can be identified.

Problem status

Studies in the field have examined the relationship between inertia and low motivation, university climate, security, hopefulness, accountability, teamwork, organizational support, work climate, communication skills, values-based management, organizational flexibility, environmental adaptation, and burnout (Aksoy & Türk, 2015; Allen, 2003; Bakan et al., 2017; Boyer & Robert, 2003; Çankaya & Demirtaş, 2010; Dorman, 2003; Farber, 2000; Fukuyama, 1998; Geisler, 1997; Godkin, 2008; Hansenne et al., 1999; Kotter, 1995; Lam, 2000; Larsen & Lomi, 1996; Maurer, 2005; Mykletun & Mykletun, 1999; Rumelt, 1995; Shimizu & Hitt, 2005; Türkmenoğlu, 2023; Zander & Kogut, 1995). Research in the field has shown that studies on stress and future anxiety, which are individual causes of inertia, are quite limited.

There are many studies in the literature on future anxiety. However, research on the subject is limited to certain variables. Research has generally examined future anxiety in terms of demographic variables, fear of unemployment, hopelessness, and exhaustion (Alaosman, 2019; Gedikli & Akdoğan, 2023; Koçeroğlu et al., 2024; Özdemir, 2020; Özgül, 2023). No studies have been found in the literature on the combined effect of stress and future anxiety on inertia. Research on personal variables that determine inertia will reveal the hidden factors that fuel inertia. In this context, this study examines the effect of stress and future anxiety, which are predicted to be two important predictors of inertia, on inertia. The study sought answers to the following questions:

- Is there a meaningful relationship between stress, future anxiety, and inertia?
- Do stress and future anxiety meaningfully predict inertia?
- Does future anxiety show a full mediating effect between stress and inertia?

METHOD

Study design

The design of this study, which examines the effect of stress and future anxiety on inertia according to the perceptions of teacher candidates, is a correlational scanning model. The relational scanning model is a research model that aims to describe a past or present situation as it is (Aypay, 2022).

Data collection tools

Perceived Stress Scale: The Perceived Stress Scale was developed by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein and adapted into Turkish by Eskin, Harlak, Demirkıran and Dereboy (2013). The scale, consisting of a total of 14 items, is designed to measure the degree to which certain situations in a person's life are perceived as stressful. The scale is evaluated as a 5-point Likert scale. Seven of the items containing positive statements are reverse scored. The scale's confirmatory factor analysis goodness-of-fit values [χ2/sd=2.11, NFI = 0.92, NNFI = 0.93, CFI = 0.90, IFI = 0.90, RFI = 0.91, GFI = 0.92, AGFI = 0.93, RMSEA = .075, and SRMR = .058] are considered valid according to the literature. (Hair, et al., 1998; Hoyle, 1995; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2005; Browne & Cudeck, 1992; Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996).

Future Anxiety Scale: The scale was developed by Ölçek et al. (2022). The scale is two--factor. Cronbach's alpha value of the 19-item scale is α= 0.91, the Cronbach's alpha value of the first factor is α=0.95, and the Cronbach's alpha value of the second factor is α=0.88. Items 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12 of the scale are reverse scored. The scale is designed as a 5-point Likert scale. In the context of this study, when the reliability of the scale was evaluated, the Cronbach alpha coefficient was calculated as 0.91. The scale's confirmatory factor analysis goodness-of--fit values [χ2/sd=2.11, NFI = 0.95, NNFI = 0.94, CFI = 0.93, IFI = 0.93, RFI = 0.94, GFI = 0.95, AGFI = 0.95, RMSEA = .071, and SRMR = .055] are valid according to the literature. (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996; Browne & Cudeck, 1992; Hair et al., 1998; Hoyle, 1995; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2005).

Inertia Scale: The scale was developed by Ölçek, Liao, Fei & Liu (2008). Adapted into Turkish by Çankaya and Demirtaş (2010). The scale has two dimensions: information inertia and experience inertia. Seven items belong to the information inertia section, and seven items belong to the experience inertia section. The Cronbach's alpha value of the scale was determined to be .741. The confirmatory factor analysis goodness-of-fit values of the scale [χ2/sd=3.01, NFI = 0.91, NNFI = 0.90, CFI = 0.89, IFI = 0.90, RFI = 0.90, GFI = 0.90, AGFI = 0.90, RMSEA = .080, and SRMR = .060] are valid according to the literatüre (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996; Browne & Cudeck, 1992; Hair et al., 1998; Hoyle, 1995; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2005).

Study group

The working group was formed by final-year students enrolled at the Faculty of Education at Uşak University during the spring semester of the 2024-2025 academic year. A link has been sent to the email addresses of final-year students in the Faculty of Education via Google Forms. A total of 480 scales, completed in full by the students, were analyzed using the SPSS AMOS 24 program. Of those in the study group, 281 are male and 199 are female.

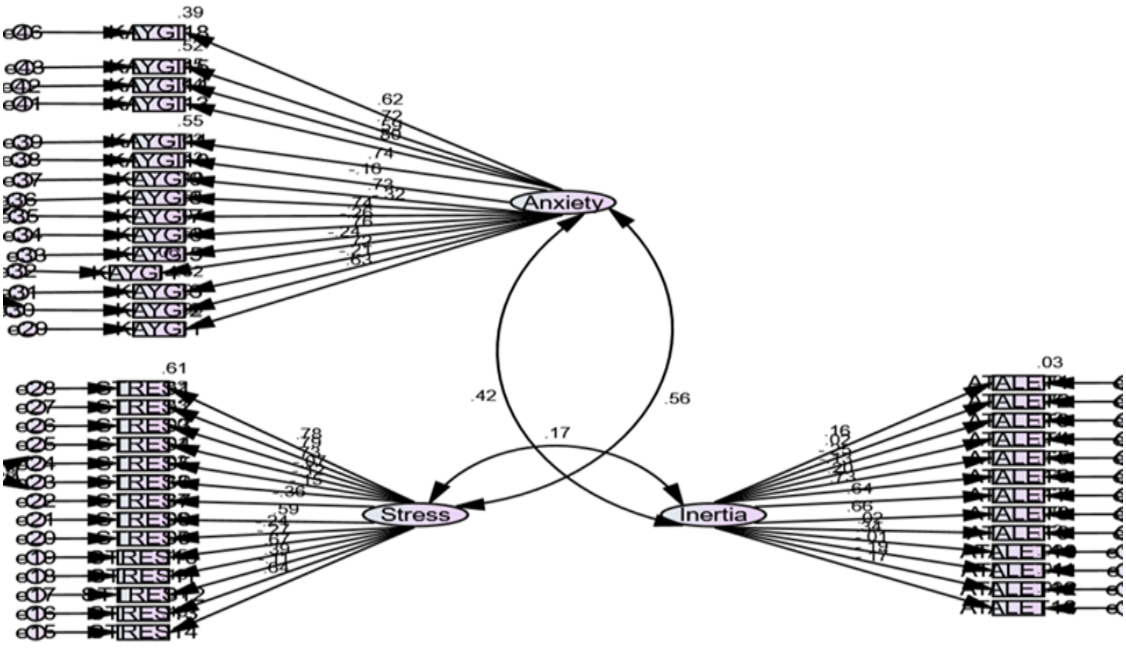
Data Analysis

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test score was taken into account to determine whether the scales showed a normal distribution. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test revealed that the stress scale (.199, p> .05), future anxiety scale (.152, p> .05), and inertia scale (.159, p> .05) data were normally distributed.

RESULT

This section presents the measurement model related to the study and the results of the mediation test with latent variables. Data on the relationship between variables and the proposed mediation model were calculated based on the overall average scores of the scales.

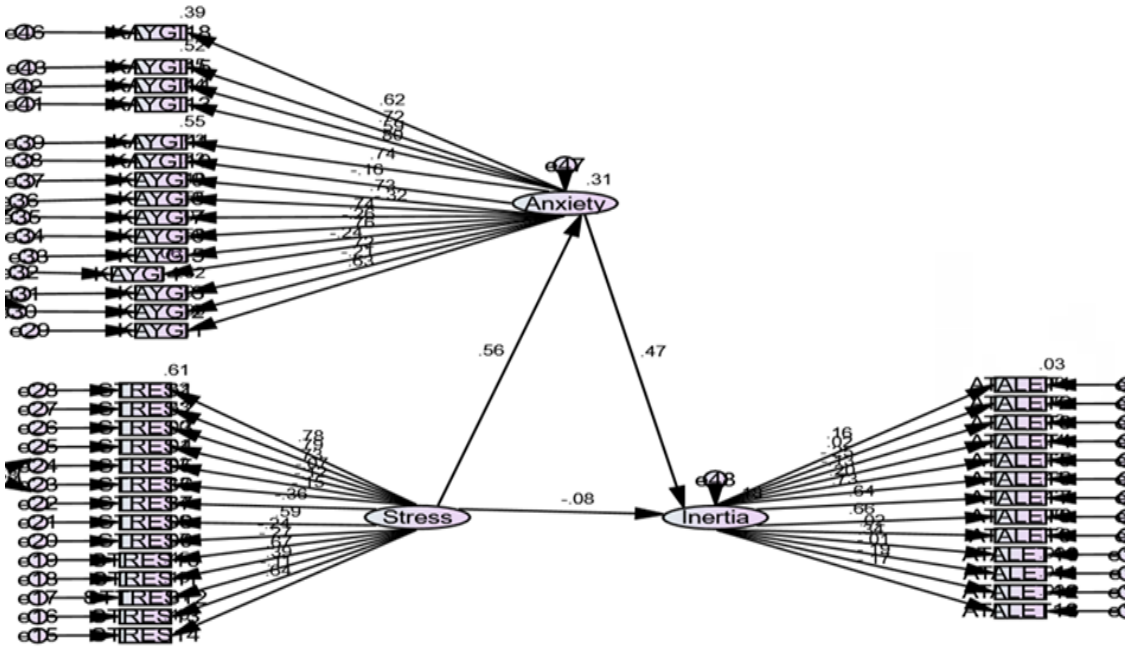
Figure 1
Measurement Model for Latent Variables



Note. Author's file (2025).

According to the analysis results obtained using the SPSS Amos 24 program, a significant and positive relationship was found between stress, future anxiety and inertia. As stress and future anxiety increase, so does inertia. The validity of the measurement model based on goodness-of-fit values [χ2/sd=2.88, NFI = 0.85, CFI = 0.86, RFI = 0.89, GFI = 0.87, AGFI = 0.88, RMSEA = .076, and SRMR = .060] is high. The existence of a meaningful relationship between three variables is considered an indication that a new mediation model can be proposed between these three variables (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996; Browne & Cudeck, 1992; Hair et al., 1998; Hoyle, 1995; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2005).

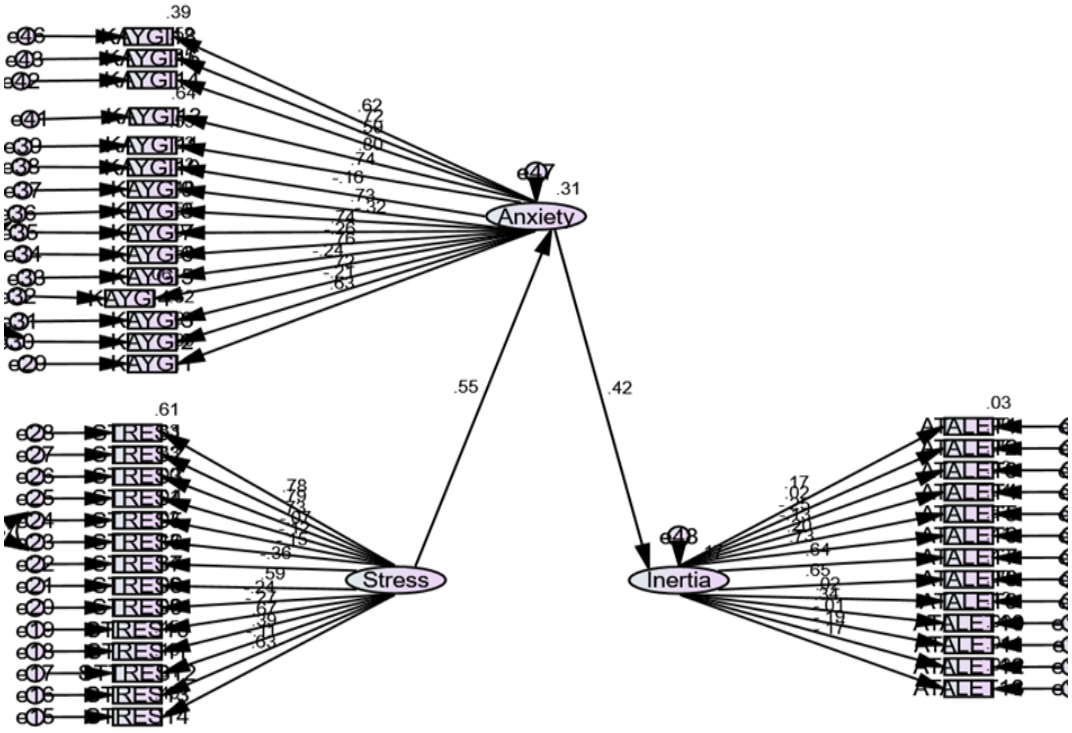
Figure 2
Identification of All Instrumental Paths Related to Latent Variables



Note. Author's file (2025).

Stress and future anxiety significantly predict inertia at a level of 18% [χ2/sd=2.91, NFI = 0.90, NNFI = 0.91, CFI = 0.88, IFI = 0.87, RFI = 0.89, GFI = 0.91, AGFI = 0.92, RMSEA = .077, and SRMR = .058]. While stress directly affects inertia at a low rate (.08), future anxietypredicts inertia at a rate of (.47). The validity of the measurement model describing all paths is supported in the literatüre (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996; Browne & Cudeck, 1992; Hair et al., 1998; Hoyle, 1995; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2005). It has been observed that stress alone does not significantly explain inertia, but that it explains inertia to a greater extent when combined with future anxiety. It can be said that the differences in the level of inertia among teacher candidates are largely due to differences in their concerns about the future. In this regard, the path showing the direct effect of stress on inertia was removed, and the mediation model in Figure 3 was proposed.

Figure 3
Mediation Effect Model



Note. Author's file (2025).

In the mediation model proposed in Figure 3, the path showing that stress directly affects inertia has been removed. There has been no significant decrease in the goodness-of--fit values of the proposed model. This proposed model demonstrates that stress significantly and powerfully influences and explains inertia through future anxiety [χ2/sd=3.04, NFI = 0.86, CFI = 0.85, RFI = 0.85, GFI = 0.86, AGFI = 0.86, RMSEA = .076, and SRMR = .059]. According to the model, stress alone does not have a significant effect on inertia, but it is a strong predictor through future anxiety.

Future anxiety and stress together account for 18% of inertia. Future anxiety has a stronger effect on inertia than stress. The validity level of the proposed mediation model is supported by the literature as being within acceptable values (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996; Browne & Cudeck, 1992; Hair et al., 1998; Hoyle, 1995; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2005). In individuals, inertia varies depending on the level of future anxiety.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

When evaluated within the framework of the literature, inertia is a condition caused by individual and environmental factors. To confirm that individual factors have a greater effect

on inertia, this study examined the impact of stress and future anxiety on inertia. According to the results of the analysis conducted in line with the fundamental questions specified in the problem statement of the study;

- A meaningful and positive correlation has been determined between stress, future anxiety and inertia.
- As stress and future anxiety increase, inertia also increases. Stress and future anxiety significantly predict inertia.
- Future anxiety has a full mediating effect between stress and inertia.

Similar research results in the literature indicate that individuals with stress and anxiety disorders also have high levels of inertia (Ahrne & Papakostas, 2001; Eroğlu & Alga, 2019; Kafchehi et al., 2012; Madjid & Samsudin, 2021; Shimizu & Hitt, 2005).

As a result, it appears that stress and future anxiety together cause an increase in inertia. To effectively manage stress and future anxiety from the perspective of adolescents; All students in higher education should be required to take course on stress management techniques. Anxiety management techniques should be a common course in all departments at universities. To manage stress and future anxiety universities should provide more guidance and psychological counseling services. Focus group interviews should be conducted to determine which thoughts and experiences cause future anxiety.

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CRediT Author Statement

Acknowledgements: No.
Funding: No.
Conflicts of interest: No.
Ethical approval: Yes.
Data and material availability: Yes.
Authors' contributions: The first author is solely responsible for the paper.

Processing and editing: Editora Ibero-Americana de Educação
Proofreading, formatting, standardization and translation