

<https://doi.org/10.33472/AFJBS.6.9.2024.3697-3714>



Analysis of the Mediating Effect of Job Search Failure Experience in the Relationship between College Graduates' Willingness to Work and Job Search Activities

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Volume 6, Issue 9, 2024

Received: 09 March 2024

Accepted: 10 April 2024

Published: 20 May 2024

[doi:10.33472/AFJBS.6.9.2024.3697-3714](https://doi.org/10.33472/AFJBS.6.9.2024.3697-3714)

Abstract: This study aimed to examine the mediating effect of repeated job failure experiences in the process of college graduates' willingness to look for a job. This study confirmed the statistical significance of the parameters through the Baron and Kenny(1986) three-step mediating effect analysis method. In Step 1, the effect of the college graduates' willingness to work on their job search activities through the mediation of their job search failure experience was examined, and the analysis results revealed the static effect of the college graduates' willingness to work ($\beta = .167$, $p < .05$). In Step 2, the static effect of college graduates' willingness to work was confirmed on their job search activities ($\beta = .132$, $p < .05$). In Step 3, analysis results showed that the willingness of college graduates to work had a partial-mediating effect by mediating the experience of job search failure and influencing job search activities. In Step 3, as a result of the Sobel test which was used to verify whether the mediating effect is significant, the derived Z value was 1.99. Since it is included in the $Z | > 1.96$ standard, the partial mediating effect has been proven to be significant.

Keywords: College graduates, willingness to work, job searching, job search failure experience, three-step mediating effect analysis, Sobel-test

1. Introduction

Recently, the term "reclusive loner" has been gaining prominence in Korean society, adopting the term "hikikomori" used in Japan. According to the Encyclopedia of Knowledge, a reclusive loner is a person who stays at home, does not have relationships with people outside of his family, and usually has no social contact with them for more than six months. According to the 'Youth Life Survey' conducted by the Government Affairs Coordination Office in March 2023 on 15,000 households, including households of young people aged 19 to 34, the number of reclusive loners is about 244,000, accounting for 2.4% of all young people in Korea.[1]

It is worth noting that "unemployment or difficulty finding a job" was the most common reason for isolation and seclusion among young people (45.5%) [2]. Given the high rate of college enrollment in South Korea, the lack of employment for college graduates is a very serious issue. In fact, the tertiary education completion rate of young people aged 25 to 34 is 69.3%, ranking first among 38 OECD countries, while the employment rate of college graduates (including graduate schools) is 76%, ranking 35th.[3]

More than ever, the willingness of college graduates to work is becoming an important social agenda. The willingness to work among college graduates refers to their positive desire to look for a job, which is the basis for increasing productivity. According to empirical studies on the willingness to work, the stronger the willingness to work, the better the working environment. In addition, a strong desire to work can lead to healthy job search activities, which can later result in better job entry into the labor market, and may even increase productivity and wage levels.[4][5][6]

While it is true that the willingness to work motivates people to look for a source of income, it does not guarantee entry into the labor market, which is why many college graduates experience job failure. While people may be more likely to look for a job after failing in the job search process, the mere experience of failing to find a job can actually reduce their motivation to find a job and cause them to stop preparing for a job.

Therefore, this study focused on examining the positive mediating effect of job search failure experienced by college graduates in the relationship between job intent and job

search. The purpose of this study was to prove the mediating effect of job search failure experience in the job search process, and to investigate the relationship between job search failure experience and job search willingness.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Willingness to Work of College Graduates

Willingness is a very important variable in determining activity. In this sense, the willingness to work is a kind of motivational attribute, which means the desire to find a job. 'Aggressiveness in looking for a job' refers to the degree of willingness to actively participate in various job search activities, and includes the concept of how much an individual wants to find a job and how much they are willing to change. [7] In other words, the willingness to look for a job should be seen as a concept that includes the qualification preparation necessary for employment and the possibility of effort effort in the search for a job. A person with a strong willingness to look for work is more likely to actively search for job information or be receptive to job training.

The relevance of willingness to look for a job can be summarized in three points. First, young job seekers' willingness to look for a job is explained by whether they are looking for a job, and it is measured by specific job search efforts, such as writing a resume or inquiring about a job search agency. [8] [9] If a young job seeker has a strong desire to find a job, he or she will have a clear idea of what kind of job they want and what activities they need to do to get it. This is because young job seekers lack the specific job information they need to enter the labor market, so they will look for information to help them determine their job search goals and suitability. Second, if a job seeker has a strong will to find a job, he or she will have a higher chance of finding a job, so the job search performance will improve.[10] This is because more job search information is available to job seekers, which increases the number of applications to companies and offers a variety of job opportunities. Third, even if they experience failure in their job search, they try to control their negative emotions, check their weaknesses, and make up for them.

The willingness to work is an essential element of employment, and the relationship between the willingness to work and employment can be confirmed through the intentional

behavior model. [11] In other words, the will to act can be seen as a factor that drives individuals to act with a focus on their goals, and this willingness to work can be seen as an important variable that has a very deep relationship with behavior toward employment.

2.2 Job Searching of College Graduates

Some prior studies on job search have shown that job search should be seen as a combination of the willingness to look for a job and the activity of looking for a job. [9] In other words, it describes an individual's willingness to seek a job based on how much they have done in their job search activities using job search resources over a period of time. On the other hand, practical research distinguishes between job search and job intention. Only those who have searched for a job using various job search resources are considered job searching. However, willingness to seek work was considered to have an impact on job search activity.

Job search activities can be divided into the preparation of the qualifications required for the job and the actual job search efforts. 'Spec' is a new word that reflects the changes in Korea in the early 2000s, and is defined in the Standard Korean Dictionary as 'a term that refers to the sum of academic background, credits, and TOEIC scores, etc., among people who are looking for a job, and a similar concept, self-development, self development, refers to spec as a spec as a psychological trait and generalizes it to various situations.[12]

Most of the existing studies related to qualification preparation for college students have shown that self-development motivation is related to 'job insecurity'. It has been shown that the higher the job anxiety or stress, the more job readiness activities there actually are. [13] However, this perspective is limited in explaining job search activities, such as actual resume writing, among other aspects of college students. This is because the motivation for qualification preparation activities can be passive due to career anxiety and job insecurity, but it can be active due to the desire to grow and learn.

On the other hand, job search preparation activities search preparation activities are career goal-oriented activities and can be defined as a process with a clear purpose of initiating or executing a series of activities to get a job.[14] Job search preparation is the process the

process of obtaining information for employment, creating alternatives, and choosing a job from these alternatives, as well as practical efforts to take action with the information gathered concerning employment. [15][16]

The job search goes through the preparatory stage and then goes to the execution stage. In the preparatory stage, information about vacancies in the labor market is continuously collected, and in the implementation phase, a job search is carried out in as many companies as possible based on the information collected, so it is necessary to include the preparatory stage as a job search activity, even if you are not looking for a job.

2.3 Job Search Failure Experience of College Graduates

College graduates who want to enter the workforce after graduating from university choose a career path after going through a career preparation process. In other words, these fresh graduates can find career information and choose suitable careers based not only on their academic performance in college but also on a personal level, based on the performance of various career preparation efforts. Young college graduates are making various efforts to acquire various qualifications necessary to find a good job, but they are not sure whether their employment attitude and the specifications they possess will help them get a job. [17]

In fact, college graduates repeatedly experience job search failures. There are a variety of reasons why college graduates fail to find a job. In addition, most unemployed young people spend excessive amounts of money and time on job preparation activities that have little to do with the job they want to land on, rather than going through a full-fledged job preparation process. [18] In addition, as job competition intensifies, people tend to focus on foreign language skills, credit management, degrees, and computer-related qualifications to increase their overall job competitiveness, rather than trying to find the job they want. [19]

In the process of entering the labor market after graduating from university, the experience of job failure and awareness of its causes are important in amplifying the desire to find a job and determining strategic job hunting patterns in order to prepare for the next opportunity. Repeated job search failures may reduce employment motivation or lead to a

population with less economic activity.[10]. However, the experience of failing to find a job may be the driving force for efforts to improve qualifications for better work. In other words, the experience of job search failure and awareness of its causes will play an important mediating role in the relationship between willingness to work and job search.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Research Hypothesis

This study established the following research hypotheses to examine the mediating effect of job search failure experience in the relationship between college graduates' willingness to find a job and job search activity.

Hypothesis 1. A college graduate's willingness to work has a positive impact on their job search.

Hypothesis 2. The experience of failing to find a job has a mediating effect on the willingness of college graduates to look for a job.

Hypothesis 3. In the relationship between job search intention and job search activity of college graduates, job search failure experience has a mediating effect, and recognizing the cause of job search failure has a mediated mediation effect.

3.2 Research Object and Variable Setting

This study was based on data from the Korea Employment Information Service's Youth Panel Survey (YP) 2021. The YP is funded by the Ministry of Employment and Labor (MOEL) and is conducted annually with official approval from Statistics Korea. The YP is conducted through the Computer Assisted Personal Interview(CAPI) method, which uses an electronic questionnaire embedded in a laptop computer. The YP2021 data is based on a sample of 12,213 young adults aged 19 to 28 as of 2021. In this study, a total of 3,674 young adults who graduated from universities (including junior colleges) were analyzed. The variables and detailed items used to analyze the hypotheses of this study are shown in Table 1.

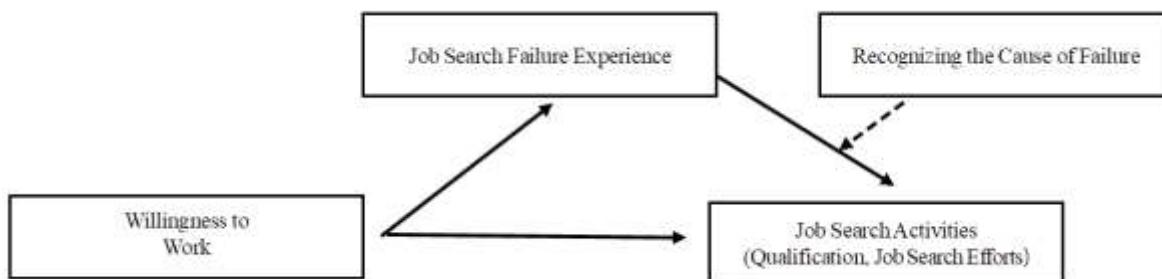
[Table 1] Variable Definition and Detailed Questions

Category		Questions to Ask	
Independent Variable	Willingness to Work		Have experience looking for a job after graduation, Have been looking for a job for less than 1 year, Have experience looking for a job in the past week, Hoping for a Job Last Week, Willingness to work in the future
Parameter	Job Search Failure Experience	Failure Experience	Have failed to search a job
		Recognizing the Cause of Failure	Lack of experience, School grades/credits, Major, Education Foreign language proficiency, Written test, Qualifications, Connections and background, Gender discrimination, Appearance
Dependent Variable	Job Search Activities	Qualification Preparation	Job-related Qualifications, Official English, Computer Qualifications, English Conversation, Second Language, Credits, Work Experience, Exam Preparation, Volunteer Activities, Club Activities, Chinese Character Proficiency, Overseas Experience, Awards, Master's and Doctoral Degree
		Job Search Efforts	Submitting a resume, Registering for a job online, Asking for relatives, seniors, and friends, Subscribing to a daily newspaper or information magazine, Asking for a teacher, Registering for a job at a public institution, Registering for a private academy, Testing for vocational aptitude/interest, Group study, Interview training, Advising a professional employment company, Having an internship

The independent variable of this study is 'Willingness to Work'. This includes items related to the willingness of college graduates to enter the workforce. The parameter of this study is 'Job Search Failure Experience', which includes the existence of job search failure among college graduates and the perception of the cause of job search failure. The dependent variable of this study, 'Job Search Activities', includes items related to self-development and work skills required by young college graduates.

3.3 Research Models and Measurements

The research model of this study was used to examine the mediating effect of job search failure experience and the mediated mediation effect of recognizing the cause of job search failure in the relationship between job search willingness and job search activity as shown in Figure 1.



[Figure. 1] Research Model

This study confirmed the statistical significance of the parameters through Baron and Kenny's three-step mediating effect analysis method.[20] In this case, multiple regression analysis using SPSS Statistics 29.0 was performed to analyze the mediating effect of job search failure experience and recognition of the cause of job search failure in the relationship between job search willingness and job search activity. The three-step mediating effect analysis method used in this study is shown in Table 2.

[Table 2] Three-Step Mediation Analysis Method

Step	Statistical Analysis Methods
Step 1	Independent Variable⇒Parameter, Statistically Significant
Step 2	Independent Variable⇒Dependent Variable, Statistically Significant
Step 3	Independent Variable, Parameter⇒Dependent Variable, Statistically Significant

This method is a three-step verification process. Step 1 is checking whether the influence of the independent variable on the parameters is statistically significant. Step 2 is checking whether the independent variable has a statistically significant effect on the dependent variable. The third and final step are checking the whether the independent variable and the parameter have a statistically significant effect on the dependent variable at the same time. After confirming the mediating effect, Sobel-test was performed to verify whether the mediating effect is significant.[21]

4. Results

4.1 Analysis of Technical Statistics and Correlation

Among the subjects of the study, 39.7%, 18.1%, 25.2%, 13.2%, and 80.6% answered "yes" to "Have experience looking for a job after graduation", "Have been looking for a job for less than 1 year", "Have experience looking for a job in the past week" and "Willingness to work in the future" respectively. In other words, the proportion of those who have experienced looking for a job after graduation was 39.7%, but the proportion of those who have been looking for a job for less than one year or in the past week dropped sharply to 18.1% to 5.2%. The proportion of people who has willingness to work to work in the future is very high at 80.6%, but the percentage of people who hope for a job in the last week has dropped sharply to 13.2%.

77.2% of respondents said they had experienced unsuccessful job searching, and only 22.8% said they had never looked for a job. The reasons for 'failure to find a job' were relatively high in the influence of 'lack of experience' (3.6 points), 'credits/credits' (3.5 points), and 'major' (3.4 points), followed by 'educational background', 'foreign language proficiency', 'written test', and 'certificate' (3.3 points). The impact of 'personal connections and background' (3.1 points), 'appearance' (2.7 points), and 'sexism' (2.6 points) on unsuccessful job search experiences was perceived as relatively low.

Respondents' job search activities were divided into two categories: Qualification Preparation and Job Search Efforts. Specifically, the contents of the Qualification Preparation were 'Job-related Qualification' (31.7%), 'Official English' (31.0%), 'Computer Certificates' (25.9%), 'English Conversation' (22.6%), and 'Second Language' (22.6%). Respondents were more likely to make efforts to find a job such as "submitting a resume" (59.0%), "registering for a job online" (50.3%), "asking for relatives, seniors, and friends" (36.4%), "subscribing to daily newspapers and information magazines" (24.5%), "looking for teachers" (23.3%), and "registering for a job at a public institution" (20.0%). The results of descriptive statistics are shown in Table 3.

[Table 3] Results of Descriptive Statistics

Category	Response Results
Willingness to Work	Have experience looking for a job after graduation(39.7%), Have been looking for a job for less than 1 year(18.1%), Have experience looking for a job in the past week(25.2%), Hoping for a Job Last Week(13.2%), Willingness to work in the future(80.6%)

Job Search Failure Experience	Failure Experience	Have failed to search a job(77.2%)
	Recognizing the Cause of Failure	Lack of experience(3.6 points), School Grades/credits(3.5 points), Major(3.4 points), Education(3.3 points), Foreign language proficiency(3.3 points), Written test(3.3 points), Qualifications(3.3 points), Connections and Background(3.1 points), Gender Discrimination(2.6 points), Appearance(2.7 points)
Job Search Activities	Qualification Preparation	Job-related Qualifications(31.7%), Official English(31.0%), Computer Qualifications(25.9%), English Conversation(22.6%), Second Language(22.6%), Credits(19.3%), Work Experience(16.6%), Exam Preparation(15.9%), Volunteer Activities(8.4%), Club Activities(7.5%), Chinese Character Proficiency(7.2%), Overseas Experience (5.1%), Awards (4.7%), Master's and Doctoral Degree (2.8%)
	Job Search Efforts	Submitting a resume(59.0%), Registering for a job online(50.3%), Asking for relatives, seniors, and friends(36.4%), Subscribing to a daily newspaper or information magazine(24.5%), Asking for a teacher(23.3%), Registering for a job at a public institution(20.0%), Registering for a private academy(9.6%), Testing for vocational aptitude/interest(15.6%), Group study(12.8%), Interview training(12.6%), Advising a professional employment company(8.6%), Having an internship(8.4%)

The results of the correlation analysis between the variables are shown in Table 4. The variables of job search (Qualification Preparation) and job search activities (Job Search Effort) were the most statistically significant ($r=.491$, $p<0.1$). In addition, there was a statistically significant correlation between willingness to work and experience of failure (.167, $p<.01$) and a significant correlation between desire to work and job search (Qualification Preparation) ($r=-.133$, $p<0.5$). On the other hand, the adjusted parameter, which is recognizing the cause of job search failure, was not statistically significant in relation to the willingness to work, failure experience, and job search activity.

[Table 4] Correlation Analysis Results between Variables (Pearson-Value)

Category	Willingness to Work (N=1021)	Job Search Failure Experience		Job Search Activities	
		Failure Experience (N=391)	Recognizing the Cause of Failure (N=302)	Qualification Preparation (N=429)	Job Search Efforts (N=429)
Willingness to Work	1				
Job Search Failure Experience	Failure Experience	.167**	1		
	Recognizing the Cause of Failure	.045	.c	1	
Job Search Activities	Qualification Preparation	-.133*	-.017	-.006	1
	Job Search Efforts	-.094	.143**	-.082	.491**

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

4.2 Analysis of Mediating Effect of Job Search Failure Experience

4.2.1 Three-Step Mediating Effect Analysis

The results of Step 1, which was analyzing the effect of college graduates' willingness to work on job search activities through the mediation of job search failure experience, are shown in Table 5. College graduates' willingness to look for a job had a positive (+) effect on their experience of failing to find a job ($\beta=.167$, $p<.05$).

[Table 5] The Influence of Willingness to Work on Job Search Failure Experience

Willingness to Work \Rightarrow Job Search Failure Experience	
B	1.063
SE	.401
β	.167
Tolerance	1.000
VIF	1.000
R ²	.028
Adj. R-Sq	.024
t	2.650
F	7.021**

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

In Step 2, the effect of college graduates' intention to work on their job search activities was analyzed. As shown in Table 6, it has a positive (+) effect ($\beta=.132$, $p<.05$).

[Table 6] The Influence of Willingness to Work on Job-Searching Actives

Willingness to Work \Rightarrow Job Searching Actives	
B	.357
SE	.168
β	.132
Tolerance	1.000
VIF	1.000
R ²	.017
Adj. R-Sq	.013
t	2.120
F	4.496*

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

In the last three-step parameter analysis, it was confirmed that the intention to work of college graduates had a partial mediating effect by influencing their job search activities through the experience of failing to find a job. As shown in Table 7, it was found that college graduates' desire to find a job had a significant effect on their job search activities through the experience of failing to find a job.

[Table 7] The Influence of Willingness to Work and Job Search Failure Experience on Job Searching

Willingness to Work * Job Search Failure Experience ⇒ Job Searching Activities		
Willingness to Work	B	.396
	SE	.172
	β	.147
	Tolerance	.972
	VIF	1.000
	t	2.298
Job Search Failure Experience	B	.081
	SE	.027
	β	.094
	Tolerance	.972
	VIF	1.000
	t	1.464
R^2		.026
Adj. R-Sq		.018
F		3.241*

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

4.2.2 Verification of mediating effect

Sobel test is a procedure to verify whether the effect of each a and b is statistically Significant, where a is the path from the independent variable to the parameter, and b is the path from the parameter to the dependent variable. The Sobel test does not apply to Step 2 among the three steps of mediated regression analysis, and is interpreted based on the B value and standard error value of Steps 1 and 3. The result of the first phase

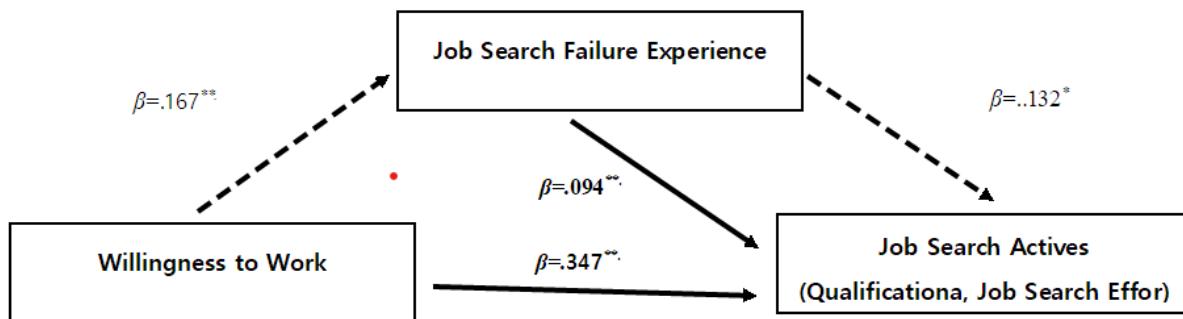
of this study, the effect of the independent variable on the parameters, was 1.063 in the first stage, and the standard error was .401 In step 3, the results of the effect of the parameter on the dependent variable had a B value of .081 and a standard error of .027. The results of the derived values according to the Sobel est calculation formula are shown in Table 8.

[Table 8] Mediating Effect Sobel-test Validation Results

Mediating Effect Pathway	Z-value	Throttling Type
Willingness to Work⇒Job Search Failure Experience⇒Job Searching Activities	1.98647138***	Partial-Mediated Effects

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

The Sobel test determines if there is there is a mediating effect when the Z value is less than -1.96 or greater than +1.96. The Z value derived from this study was 1.98647138 since it corresponded to $Z|>1.96$, it was found that the partial mediating effect was significant.



[Figure. 2] A Model of the Mediating Effect of Job Search Failure between Willingness to Work and Job Searching

The research model was revised based on the results of analyzing the mediating mediating effect of the experience of job search failure and the recognition of the cause of job search failure in the relationship between job search will and job search activity. In this study, the control parameter, the recognition of the cause of job search failure, was not statistically significant in relation to the relationship between job willingness, failure experience, and job search activity. In addition, the mediating effect model of failure experience in relation to job search was found to be statistically significant. As shown in Figure 2, the independent variable, the willingness to work, and the experience of failure to find a job, both had a statistically significant effect on the dependent variable, which is the job search activity job search activity ($F = 3.241$, $p<.05$). Specifically, it was found that the

independent variable, willingness to work, had a static (+) effect on the dependent variable, job search activity ($F=.357$, $p<.05$), while the independent variable, willingness to work, had a statistically significant static (+) effect on the parameter of job search failure ($F = 1.63$, $p<.01$). In addition, it was analyzed that the experience of job search failure, which is a parameter, had a positive (+) effect ($F=.082$, $p<.05$) on the dependent variable, job search activity.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the mediating effect of job search failure experience and recognition of job search failure cause in the relationship between job search will and job search activity, and established a relationship model between job willingness, job search failure experience, and job search activity. Based on the main findings, the implications are as follows.

First, it was found that the willingness of college graduates to work had a statistically significant static (+) effect on their experience of job search failure. In other words, the willingness of college graduates to find a job increases the probability of not only success but also failure in employment. The results of this analysis show that it is very important that the willingness of college graduates to work does not decrease after experiencing job failure.

Second, it was confirmed that the willingness of college graduates to work had a positive (+) effect on job search activities. When a young college graduate has the will to find a job, he or she is actively supported for employment. In other words, various efforts will be made to prepare for specifications and job search. However, for their job hunting activities to lead to employment, it is necessary to reduce the frequency of job search failure by establishing job search activities strategies that meet the standards required by companies.

Third, in this study, the mediating effect model of job search failure experience was verified to be statistically significant in the relationship between job will and job search activity. According to this model, it can be seen that the willingness to work causes the experience of job search failure, which in turn leads to job search activities of spec preparation and job search preparation. This suggests that at the time of experiencing job

search failure, feedback on the willingness to work and job hunting activities is very important.

Based on the results of the study, the policy and practical implications of the plan to enhance the will of college graduates to work are as follows.

First, young college graduates' willingness to seek employment and job search should be socially recognized, regardless of whether they succeed in finding a job. In particular, government policies and systems that encourage young college graduates to enter the workforce should actively support their willingness to look for jobs and their search for jobs. In particular, it is necessary to prioritize the provision of a psychological support system to prevent the decline in the will of college graduates from deteriorating in the process of repeated unsuccessful job searches.

Second, it is worth noting that the frequency of unsuccessful job search experiences can weaken the will to find a job. When a young college graduate fails to find a job, it is important to analyze the cause of the immediate job search failure. Based on the objective analysis, recognizing the causes of job search failure and to establish a specification strategy that is useful for the next job opportunity in needed.

Third, young people are finding it difficult to find a job in various aspects. Employment support policies and systems for young college graduates should be subdivided into areas of enhancing the will to work, objective recognition and psychological support for failure experiences, support for spec preparation and job search information, and systematic individual career management and competency enhancement programs should be prepared so that the strengths of each program can be mutually synergized.

5. Acknowledgment

This paper was supported by the Research Fund, 2023, Pyeongtaek University in Korea

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