



The Influence of Family on Career Choice and Career Construction Among Emerging Adults: The Mediating Role of Career Stress

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ABSTRACT

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This study investigated the mediating role of career stress in the relationship between family influence on career choice and career construction among emerging adults. Utilizing a quantitative correlational survey design data were collected via online surveys from a sample of emerging adults in Turkey. Structural validity of the measurement model was confirmed through confirmatory factor analysis and the hypothesized mediation pathways were tested using bootstrapping methods. Correlation analyses revealed that family influence was negatively associated with career stress and positively associated with career construction. Furthermore mediation analysis demonstrated that family influence significantly and negatively predicted career stress which in turn exerted a negative impact on career construction. Career stress was found to play a partial mediating role in this relationship. These findings suggest that supportive family environments serve as a crucial stress-buffering mechanism that ultimately optimizes the career construction process for emerging adults.

KEYWORDS:

emerging adulthood, career construction, family influence, career stress, career construction theory.

INTRODUCTION

Emerging adulthood represents an intermediary transitional period between the completion of adolescence and the assumption of adult roles (Arnett, 2004). This phase is widely recognized as a distinct developmental period characterized by exploration, instability, and identity formation (Arnett, 2000). Late adolescence to the mid-twenties this transitional stage is heavily identified with numerous choices and challenges particularly regarding career development. During this critical period individuals embark on a journey of self-discovery, striving to forge meaningful pathways in domains such as education, work, and relationships (Arnett, 2010). As they transition from the structured environment of education into the realities of the workforce, they encounter a myriad of stressors and uncertainties (Reifman et al., 2007). Consequently, career decision-making which is defined as a

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fundamental developmental task of emerging adulthood (Hartung & Taber, 2015), exploring career options, clarifying career direction (Aslan, 2021), and preparing for future vocational and professional life (Arnett, 2006) become the focal points of intensive reflection during this stage.

As the contemporary world of work has entered an era characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (Savickas et al., 2009), individuals' adaptability in career development has become more critical than ever. In this context, the Career Construction Theory developed by Savickas (2013) conceptualizes an individual's career as a lifelong construction process, focusing on the interplay among subjective meanings, life stories, and environmental factors. Placing career adapt-abilities at its core (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012), the theory emphasizes how individuals interpret contextual factors, adapt to them, and actively construct their careers through these internal resources (Savickas, 2013). In this regard, Career Construction Theory provides a robust framework for understanding how emerging adults actively construct and deconstruct their vocational identities in response to changing conditions (Savickas, 2005). Rather than viewing career development as a linear progression toward a predetermined goal, career

Muhammed Musab ASLAN, The Influence of Family on Career Choice and Career Construction Among Emerging Adults: The Mediating Role of Career Stress

construction emphasizes an iterative process of exploration, reflection, and adaptation. Emerging adults engage in a continuous process of self-discovery, drawing upon their experiences, values, and interests to shape their career trajectories.

During the transition to adulthood, individuals engage in a continuous process of meaning-making as they integrate their personal interests, values, and goals with external opportunities and the demands of professional life (Savickas, 2015; Tanner & Arnett, 2016). These challenges faced by emerging adults are also accompanied by the evolution and transformation of family relationships. Although the individual's relational focus shifts from the family toward the broader social environment during this period (Aslan, 2021), the impact of the family on career development processes remains a critical area that warrants close examination.

The family is recognized as the primary social context that shapes an individual's values, interests, attitudes, and life goals from birth onward (Koçakoğlu & Yalçın, 2020). Family influence guides career development through parents' educational attainment, socioeconomic status, expectations, supportive or intrusive attitudes, and the role models they offer to their children. This influence persists throughout emerging adulthood. While family support, guidance, and functional relationships positively impact an individual's career exploration behaviors, an overly intrusive approach, excessively high expectations, or intra-family conflicts can hinder young people from constructing their authentic career identities (Bryant et al., 2006). Extant research has demonstrated that family influence exhibits significant relationships with career decision-making self-efficacy and career adapt-abilities (Aşık & Akgül, 2022). These findings indicate that the family can exert a dual-faceted impact on career development, serving as either a constructive asset or an obstructive barrier.

Family dynamics, including parental expectations, support, and modeling, can exert a profound influence on career decision-making processes (Whiston & Keller, 2004). Parents often serve as role models and mentors in this process, offering guidance and advice rooted in their own experiences and values (Fuligni et al., 1999). However, parental expectations can also lead to conflict and tension, particularly when they diverge from the individual's own aspirations and values. While the family serves as the primary agent of socialization that transmits career-related values, beliefs, and expectations (Super, 1990), the impact of family dynamics on career choice is multifaceted and complex, heavily influenced by cultural norms, socioeconomic status, and intergenerational dynamics (Murphy et al., 2010). Amidst this unique developmental period, one of the prominent concepts thought to influence career initiatives is career stress.

Defined as the psychological and emotional strain experienced during the career decision-making and exploration process (Hirschi, 2012; Saka et al., 2008), career

stress emerges as a salient feature of the emerging adulthood experience. The transition from adolescence to adulthood is accompanied by increased responsibilities, heightened expectations, and both internal and external pressures. As emerging adults navigate the complex landscape of career options and opportunities, they grapple with questions of identity, purpose, and competence (Arnett, 2007). Additionally, emerging adults face unique stressors within the contemporary socioeconomic context. Rapid technological advancements, globalization, and economic instability compel these aspiring adults to step into a world characterized by uncertainty and rapid change. Career stressors encompass diverse factors such as future uncertainty, financial pressures, and societal expectations (Hartung & Taber, 2015). These stressors can induce feelings of anxiety, indecisiveness, and self-doubt, thereby complicating or hindering the exploration and pursuit of meaningful career paths. Traditional linear trajectories to career success are increasingly vanishing, requiring individuals to demonstrate adaptability and flexibility in the face of the changing demands of the workforce (Savickas, 2011). Furthermore, emerging adults may experience internal conflicts as they reconcile personal aspirations with workforce expectations and professional boundaries. The discrepancy between an individual's ideal career goals and the realities of professional life or parental expectations can contribute to feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction (Salmela-Aro & Upadyaya, 2014). Navigating these pressures requires resilience and adaptive coping strategies to maintain a sense of purpose during the career decision-making process.

Given the significance of these factors in shaping the career development of emerging adults, there is a growing need to examine the relationships among family influence on career choice, career construction, and career stress. Some studies suggest that supportive family environments can buffer the impact of career stressors and facilitate constructive career development processes (Guichard, 2013). Conversely, family dynamics characterized by conflict, criticism, or over-involvement can exacerbate career stress and impede effective decision-making (Whiston & Keller, 2004). Understanding how these variables interact can provide valuable insights for career counselors and researchers working with emerging adults in the vocational domain.

Recent studies have begun to explore the relationships among family influence, career stress, and career development in emerging adults. Aşık and Akgül (2022) found that family influence on career decisions and career stress predicted career decision-making self-efficacy among college students and that family influence was not associated with career stress. A study conducted by Çelik (2024) identified a positive relationship between helicopter parenting and career stress, demonstrating that career stress mediated the relationship between parenting attitudes and career instability. Furthermore, Wang (2023) revealed that career expectation

Muhammed Musab ASLAN, The Influence of Family on Career Choice and Career Construction Among Emerging Adults: The Mediating Role of Career Stress

pressure and career decision self-efficacy played mediating roles in the effect of overparenting on career indecision. Although various studies in national and international literature have separately examined the relationships between family influence and career development, or between career stress and career adaptability (Demirtaş & Kara, 2022; Erzen & Kara, 2022; Guan et al., 2015; Hou et al., 2019; Johnston, 2018; Koçakoğlu & Yalçın, 2020; Pisker, 2022; Turner et al., 2004), a significant gap persists in the existing literature. To date, most studies have primarily linked variables such as family influence on career choice and career stress with outcomes like career decision-making self-efficacy or career indecision. However, within the framework of Career Construction Theory, no research has directly investigated the mediating role of career stress in the relationship between family influence on career choice and the career construction of emerging adults. In other words, how the directive or restrictive influence of the family affects the process by which emerging adults construct their own careers, and the underlying dynamics of this influence, remain understudied. The present study aims to fill this void in the literature. The primary hypothesis of this research is that career stress serves as a mediating mechanism in the effect of family influence on the career construction processes of emerging adults. By testing this hypothesis, this study aims to enhance the understanding of how familial factors influence career development and to establish a foundation for developing family-oriented interventions in career counseling services.

METHOD

Research Design

This study utilized a correlational survey design, employing quantitative research methods for data analysis. The independent variable of the study is family influence on career choice, the dependent variable is career construction, and the mediating variable is career stress.

Population and Sample

The population of the study consists of emerging adults in Turkey. According to data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat, 2023), there are 6,396,519 individuals aged 15–19 and 6,475,520 individuals aged 20–24 in Turkey. Emerging adults constituting the population and sample of this study are individuals within the 18–25 age range (Arnett, 2007). Büyüköztürk et al. (2008) state that a sample size of 384 individuals is sufficient to represent a population exceeding 500,000 with a 0.05 margin of error. The sample of the present study comprises 402 individuals.

Data Collection Process

Initially, permissions for the utilization of the scales were obtained from the respective authors via e-mail. Subsequently, institutional review board (ethics committee) approval was secured. Data were collected via Google Forms during the 2023–2024 academic year. An informed consent

form was presented to the participants, detailing their rights and responsibilities, and they were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.

Data Collection Instruments

Family Influence on Career Choice Scale (FIS)

Developed by Fouad et al. (2010) through studies conducted on individuals aged 18–62 in the United States, the scale's cross-cultural adaptation to Turkish was conducted by Özünlü and Bacanlı (2015) with high school students. The scale is a 5-point Likert-type instrument consisting of 22 items, including two reverse-scored items, and four subscales. The adaptation and validation study of the scale for university students was carried out by Aşık and Akgül (2022). Although the original scale consisted of 22 items, one item was removed following confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) due to a low regression coefficient, resulting in a final 21-item version. Because Aşık and Akgül (2022) designated university students as their sample, they re-examined the validity and reliability of the scale; exploratory factor analysis (EFA) revealed that the scale accounted for 57% of the total variance. The scale was found to possess a four-factor structure: "informational support," "financial support," "values and beliefs," and "family expectations." The reliability coefficient of the scale was reported as .80.

Student Career Construction Inventory (SCCI)

The original instrument is the Student Career Construction Inventory developed by Savickas et al. (2018) for university students. The inventory consists of 18 items. The Turkish adaptation of the inventory was conducted by Sevinç and Siyez (2018). As a result of the confirmatory factor analysis they performed, the three-factor structure was validated. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was found to be .65 for the "crystallizing" subscale, .72 for the "exploring" subscale, and .87 for the "deciding" subscale, while the reliability coefficient for the overall inventory was .87.

Career Stress Scale (CSI)

Developed by Choi et al. (2011) to determine the career-related stress levels of university students, the scale was adapted into Turkish literature by Özden and Sertel-Berk (2017). The 5-point Likert-type scale demonstrated an internal consistency coefficient of .94 and a test-retest reliability coefficient of .81. The scale, which has an overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .91, consists of three subfactors: "career uncertainty and lack of information," "external conflict," and "employment pressure." The item-total score correlations ranged from .44 to .80.

Personal Information Form

Developed within the scope of this research, this form includes questions regarding the demographic and academic characteristics of the participants (e.g., institution, department, age, housing status, internship, and professional experience) as well as questions addressing their parents' educational attainment and parenting attitudes.

Muhammed Musab ASLAN, The Influence of Family on Career Choice and Career Construction Among Emerging Adults: The Mediating Role of Career Stress

Data Analysis

In the first stage, the normal distribution of the data was examined. The skewness and kurtosis values of the data were found to be within the range of -1 and +1 (Table 1). Since the data values of the model fell between -1 and +1, the data can be considered to be normally distributed (Hair et al., 2010). In the second stage, the measurement model was tested via Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using SPSS AMOS 24.0; furthermore, SPSS 26.0 was utilized to evaluate the correlations between variables and to examine descriptive statistics. SPSS AMOS allows for CFA to be performed for predetermined scales prior to constructing the structural equation model and provides built-in goodness-of-fit indices (Byrne, 2010). In the third stage, SPSS PROCESS Macro (Model 4) was utilized to examine the mediating role of Career Stress (CSS) in the relationship between Family Influence on Career Choice (FICCS) and Career Construction (SCCI). To test the significance of the mediation effect, the bootstrapping method was applied with 5,000 resamples at a 95% confidence interval, and the significance level was accepted as $p < .05$.

Ethical Declaration

Ethics committee approval for the execution of this study was granted by the Republic of Turkey Dokuz Eylül University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee, with decision number 7, dated October 15, 2024, and numbered E-87347630-659-1170747.

RESULTS

The primary objective of this study was to examine the mediating effect of career stress in the relationship between family influence on career choice and career construction. Prior to conducting the mediation analysis, the suitability of the dataset for multivariate analyses was evaluated. Within this scope, missing data analysis, outlier detection, and normality assumptions were examined. The analysis revealed that the skewness and kurtosis values of the variables were within statistically acceptable limits. Specifically, the skewness and kurtosis values were -.28 and -.02 for Family Influence on Career Choice (FICC), .28 and -.62 for Career Stress (CS), and -.34 and -.36 for Career Construction (CC), respectively. According to the literature, skewness and kurtosis values falling within ± 1.0 range provide strong evidence that the data are normally distributed and that parametric tests can be safely applied (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Correlations Among Study Variables

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	FICC	CS	CC
1. Family Influence on Career Choice	3.17	0.54	-		
2. Career Stress	2.51	0.83	-0.18**	-	
3. Career Construction	3.42	0.74	0.19**	-0.45**	
Skewness			-0.28	0.28	-0.34
Kurtosis			-0.02	-0.62	-0.36

Note. $N = 402$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

An evaluation of the descriptive findings indicates that the participants' perceived family influence on career choice was above the moderate level ($M = 3.17$, $SD = .54$), whereas their career stress levels remained at a relatively low-to-moderate level ($M = 2.51$, $SD = .83$). Furthermore, the career construction scores ($M = 3.42$, $SD = .74$) suggest that the students possess a high level of capacity to adapt to their vocational futures. When the Pearson correlation coefficients among the variables were examined, a statistically significant negative correlation was found between family influence on career choice and career stress ($r = -.18$, $p < .01$). Conversely, a statistically significant positive correlation was observed between family influence on career choice and career construction ($r = .19$, $p < .01$). Lastly, a moderate and statistically significant negative correlation was identified

between career stress and career construction ($r = -.45$, $p < .01$).

The Measurement Model

To evaluate the structural validity and discriminant validity of the measurement scales, a multi-factor measurement model—in which indicators of all latent variables were simultaneously included—was specified, and a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed using AMOS 24.0 software. The measurement model demonstrated a good fit to the empirical data: $\chi^2 = 2010.592$, $df = 1349$, $\chi^2/df = 1.490$, CFI = .951, TLI = .938, and RMSEA = .035 (PCLOSE = 1.000). It can be concluded that all fit indices fully met the recommended threshold criteria established by Hu and Bentler (1999), thereby confirming the robustness and adequacy of the measurement model for further analysis.

Muhammed Musab ASLAN, The Influence of Family on Career Choice and Career Construction Among Emerging Adults: The Mediating Role of Career Stress

Findings from the Mediation Analysis

To address the primary aim of the study, the mediating role of career stress in the effect of family influence on career choice on career construction was analyzed using SPSS PROCESS Macro (Model 4) developed by Hayes (2022), which utilizes the bootstrapping method. In the analysis process, 5,000 bootstrap resamples were generated, and the estimates were examined within a 95% confidence interval.

For a mediation effect to be considered statistically significant, the confidence interval must not include zero (Hayes, 2022). The results of the analysis are reported across two sequential regression models. The first model tested the predictive effect of family influence on career choice on career stress (Path a), while the second model simultaneously analyzed the effects of family influence on career choice and career stress on career construction (Path b and Path c').

Table 2: Standardized Coefficients and 95% Bootstrap Confidence Intervals for the Mediation Model

	Career Stress (CS)			Career Construction (CC)		
	β	LL	UL	β	LL	UL
Family Influence on Career Choice (FICC)	-.25***	-.3956	-.1104	.13***	.0243	.2338
Career Stress (CS)	—	—	—	-.34***	-.4090	-.2668
r^2	.03			.21***		

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. LLCI = Lower Level Confidence Interval; ULCI = Upper Level Confidence Interval.

As shown in Table 2, the direct effect of family influence on career choice on career stress (Path a) was analyzed first. The findings indicate that family influence significantly and negatively predicted career stress ($\beta = -.25$, $p < .001$). This initial model accounted for approximately 3% of the total variance in career stress ($r^2 = .03$).

In the second stage, family influence on career choice and career stress were simultaneously entered into the model to examine their combined effects on career construction. This model accounted for a significant proportion (21%) of the total variance in career construction ($r^2 = .21$, $p < .001$). An examination of the model coefficients revealed that career stress exerted a highly significant negative direct effect on career construction (Path b; $\beta = -.34$, $p < .001$). Crucially,

even after controlling for the mediating variable, the direct effect of family influence on career choice on career construction (Path c') remained positive and statistically significant ($\beta = .13$, $p < .05$).

The bootstrap analysis results conducted to test the statistical significance of the indirect effect of family influence on career choice on career construction are detailed below.

Indirect, Direct, and Total Effects

The most critical phase of mediation analysis involves testing the statistical significance of the independent variable's indirect effect on the dependent variable via the bootstrapping method (Hayes, 2018).

Table 3: Total, Direct, and Indirect Effects for the Mediation Model

Paths	β	LLCI	ULCI
Total Effect	0.22 ***	0.101	0.328
FICC – CC	0.13 ***	0.024	0.234
FICC - CS- CC	0.09	0.030	0.152

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. FICC = Family Influence on Career Choice; CS = Career Stress; CC = Career Construction.

As presented in Table 3, when the total effect (Path c) was calculated prior to including the mediator in the model, family influence on career choice significantly and positively predicted career construction ($\beta = .22$, $p < .001$). The reduction in the total effect coefficient (from $\beta = .22$ to $\beta = .13$) upon the inclusion of the mediator variable strongly points to the presence of a mediating effect in the model.

According to the bootstrapping results in Table 3, the indirect effect of family influence on career choice on emerging adults' career construction was statistically significant ($\beta = .09$, 95% CI [.030, .152]). The fact that the lower and upper bootstrap confidence intervals did not contain zero confirms the hypothesis that career stress plays a partial mediating role in this relationship.

Muhammed Musab ASLAN, The Influence of Family on Career Choice and Career Construction Among Emerging Adults: The Mediating Role of Career Stress

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

The present study investigated the mediating role of career stress in the relationship between the level of career construction and the family's influence on career choice among emerging adults. The empirical findings reveal both direct and indirect relationships among the variables, demonstrating that career stress plays a partial mediating role in this relationship.

The first major finding of this study is that family influence on career choice is a significant negative predictor of career stress ($r^2 = .03, \beta = -.253, p < .001$). In other words, as parental influence on career decision-making processes increases, the career stress experienced by emerging adults decreases. The extant literature underscores that environmental support factors, such as social support, serve as facilitating mechanisms by helping individuals regulate their emotional responses and enhance their self-efficacy beliefs (Eryılmaz & Kara, 2018; Işık, 2013; Lent & Brown, 1996). Particularly in societies characterized by dominant relational (Dalğar, 2012) and collectivistic cultural orientations (Cosma, 2025; Hofstede et al., 2010), parental guidance and emotional support may function as a source of security against uncertainty for emerging adults. Individuals who receive parental support regarding their career choices likely feel more secure, which in turn enables them to manage their future anxieties more effectively, thereby contributing to a reduction in their stress levels.

The second finding indicates a significant negative relationship between career stress and career construction ($\beta = -.34, p < .001$). Furthermore, family influence on career choice and career stress together serve as robust predictors of career construction, accounting for 21% of the total variance ($r^2 = .21$). This result indicates that students experiencing high levels of stress suffer a negative impact on their career construction. According to Career Construction Theory, individuals must effectively deploy their adaptation resources to construct their careers (Li, 2021). However, heightened career stress is thought to deplete these cognitive and affective resources (Spurk & Hofer, 2025), thereby impeding individuals' capacity to fulfill developmental career tasks.

The most critical outcome of this research is that career stress partially mediates the relationship between family influence on career choice and career construction. The bootstrapping analysis demonstrated that family influence on career choice significantly affects career construction both directly ($\beta = .13$) and indirectly by mitigating career stress ($\beta = .09$). According to Preacher and Kelley (2011), an effect size of .01 indicates a small effect, .09 indicates a medium effect, and .25 indicates a large effect. Accordingly, the indirect effect of family influence on career construction through career stress can be characterized as a medium-sized effect ($\beta = .09$). This underscores that the positive impact of the family in the career process is not confined to assisting individuals in charting their vocational trajectories; it also facilitates better career

adaptation by alleviating contextual stressors along the way. Although family influence directly fosters career construction, the reduction of stress renders this process considerably more efficient. This finding makes a unique contribution to the literature by demonstrating that focusing solely on individual competencies in career interventions may be insufficient; instead, family dynamics and stress management must be addressed concurrently. As supported by previous literature, the partial mediation finding implies that the overarching impact of family influence on career construction cannot be accounted for solely through the mechanism of stress. Rather, the family also contributes to the construction process through diverse mechanisms such as modeling (Savickas, 2013), providing social networks (Böhle et al., 2025), guiding (Powers et al., 1993), and transmitting values (Johnson et al., 2020). This aligns seamlessly with the social constructionist epistemology of Career Construction Theory.

The findings derived from this study are considered to offer strategic contributions to career counseling practices. Since family influence on career choice negatively predicts career stress, the family is interpreted to function as a stress-buffering mechanism (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Review of the literature reveals that family support is inversely related to various stressors. For instance, in their meta-analysis, Michel et al. (2010) found that family social support was significantly and negatively related to stressors such as role conflict and role ambiguity. Similarly, Odle-Dusseau et al. (2013) demonstrated in a longitudinal study that family-supportive work environments reduce stress over time. Specifically, the dimensions of family support emphasized by Özünlü and Bacanlı (2015) may establish a foundation for students to cope with stressors such as employment pressure and career uncertainty.

Practical Implications

In light of the empirical findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Family-Oriented Career Counseling:** Involving families in the services provided by high school and university career centers could yield positive outcomes. Seminars can be organized to help families recognize their "supportive/facilitating" roles in their children's career construction process and to encourage them to provide guidance rather than adopting authoritarian or pressuring attitudes.
2. **Stress Management Programs:** To enhance students' career construction capacities, psychoeducational programs incorporating stress-coping strategies can be implemented alongside standard career planning workshops.
3. **Holistic Interventions:** When evaluating a student's career construction status, career counselors should incorporate the quality of familial support and the

Muhammed Musab ASLAN, The Influence of Family on Career Choice and Career Construction Among Emerging Adults: The Mediating Role of Career Stress

student's current stress level as essential intake and baseline assessment data.

Recommendations for Future Research

- This study was conducted using a quantitative design; future research could employ qualitative methods to conduct in-depth interviews exploring exactly how parental influence generates a stress-reducing effect on students during career selection.
- The sample group may be limited in scope. Future studies could expand the sample to include students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and different academic faculties.
- The moderating role of demographic variables—such as gender and academic year—within this mediation model could be investigated.

Declaration of Conflict Interests

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Ethical Statement

This material is the authors' own original work, which has not been previously published elsewhere. Informed consent form containing information about the study was signed by all the participants in the study. The paper reflects the authors' own research and analysis in a truthful and complete manner. All authors have been personally and actively involved in substantial work leading to the paper, and will take public responsibility for its content. Ethics approval was obtained from the university at the beginning of the research, the information was written in the article. Part of this research study was presented as an oral online presentation at the VI. 6. International Anatolian Scientific Research Congress 08 November 2024.

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**Muhammed Musab ASLAN, The Influence of Family on Career Choice and Career Construction Among Emerging Adults:
The Mediating Role of Career Stress**

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Muhammed Musab ASLAN, The Influence of Family on Career Choice and Career Construction Among Emerging Adults:
The Mediating Role of Career Stress

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