

## Analysis of the mediating effect on relationship between job searching activities and willingness to work of college graduates

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to examine the mediating effect of job failure experiences and recognizing the cause of failure in the job search process after college graduation. 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 job search activities on the job search failure experience 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 ( $\beta = .133, p < .05$ ). In Step 2, the static effect of the job search activities was confirmed on the college graduates' willingness to work ( $\beta = .086, p < .01$ ). In Step 3, analysis results showed that the job search activities had a mediating effect by mediating the experience of job search failure and influencing the college graduates' willingness to work. Additionally, the research model was revised based on the results of analyzing the partial mediating effect of recognizing the cause of failure in the relationship between the job search failure experience and the willingness to work.

**Keywords:** College graduates, Job search failure experience, Job searching activities, Recognizing the cause of failure, Three-step mediating effect analysis, Willingness to work.

### 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 2025 on 15,098 households, including households of young people aged 19 to 34, the number of reclusive loners is about 5.2% 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 (32.8%) [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 69.7%, ranking first among 38 OECD countries, while the employment rate of college graduates (including graduate schools) is 70.3%, 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 to better job entry into the labor market, and may even increase productivity and wage levels [4-6].

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 searching activities and willingness to work. 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 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 job searching activities have a positive impact on their willingness to work.

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(hereafter "YP"). The YP is a longitudinal survey conducted annually from 2001 on a sample of 5,956 that represents Korean youth (from 15 to 29 years old). The YP 2021 Survey was planned to expand the age of 20s and expand the overall scale in order to solve the age obsolescence caused by the long-term follow-up of the existing Youth Panel Survey, and as of 2021, a sample of 12,000 young people aged 19~28 was constructed, and the follow-up survey is currently underway [20]. In this study, a total of 1,573 young adults who graduated from universities(including junior colleges) were analyzed. General Characteristics of them are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.**  
General Charateristics.

Category		Number	Composition Ratio(%)
Sex	Man	657	41.8
	Women	916	58.2
Final Education	Junior Colleges	485	30.8
	Universities	1,088	69.2

And the variables and detailed items used to analyze the hypotheses of this study are shown in Table 2.

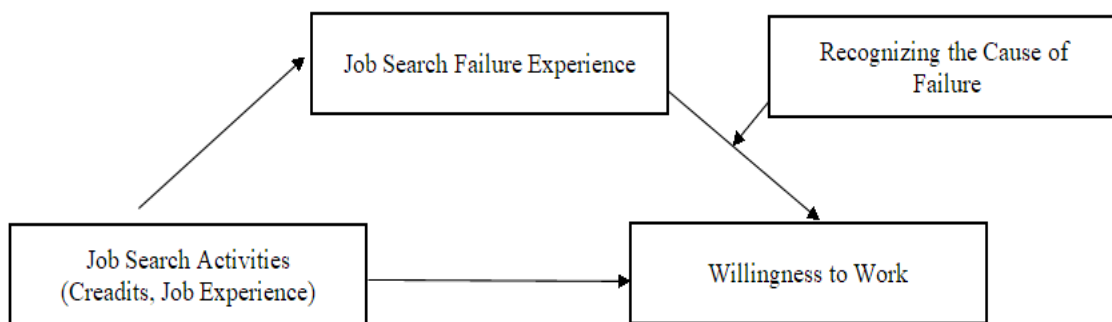
**Table 2.**  
Variable Definition and Detailed Questions.

Category		Questions to Ask
Independent Variable	Job Search Activities	Credits, Work Experience
Parameter	Job Search Failure Experience	Number of failures job searches
	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	Willingness to Work	Have experience looking for a job after graduation

The independent variable of this study, 'Job Search Activities', includes items related to self-development and work skills required by young college graduates. The parameter of this study is 'Job Search Failure Experience', 'Recognizing the Cause of Filure', 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 is 'Willingness to Work'. This includes items related to the willingness to enter the workforce.

### 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 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 [21]. 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 activity and job search willingness. The three-step mediating effect analysis method used in this study is shown in Table 3 [22].

**Table 3.**  
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.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Analysis of Technical Statistics and Correlation

Among the subjects of the study, the contents of job search activities were 'credits'(36.2%) and 'work experience'(39.5%). The number of failures job searches was '1~2times'(58.6%), '3~4times'(20.1%), '5~6times'(5.3%), '6times or more'(16.0%). The reasons for 'failure to find a job' were relatively high in the influence of 'lack of experience' (3.6%), 'School Grades/credits' (3.5%), and 'major' (3.4%), followed by 'educational background'(3.3%), 'foreign language proficiency'(3.3%), 'written test'(3.3), and 'qualification'(3.3%). The impact of personal connections and background' (3.1%), 'gender discrimination'(2.6%), and 'appearance' (2.7%) on unsuccessful job search experiences was perceived as relatively low. Respondents' 82.3% answered "yes" to "Have experience looking for a job after graduation". The results of descriptive statistics are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.**  
Results of Descriptive Statistics.

Category	Response Results
Job Search Activities	Credits (Yes 36.2%, No 63.8%) Work experience (Yes 39.5%, No 60.5%)
Job Search Failure Experience	Number of failures job searches (1~2times 58.6%, 3~4times 20.1%, 5~6times 5.3%, 6times or more 16.0%)
Recognizing the Cause of Failure	Lack of experience(3.6%), School Grades/credits(3.5%), Major(3.4%), Education(3.3%), Foreign language proficiency(3.3%), Written test(3.3%), Qualifications(3.3%), Connections and Background(3.1 %), Gender Discrimination(2.6%), Appearance(2.7%)
Willingness to Work	Have experience looking for a job after graduation (Yes 82.3%, No 17.7%)

The results of the correlation analysis between the variables are shown in Table 5. The variables of job search activities and job search failure experience were statistically significant ( $\alpha=-.133$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). In addition, there was a statistically significant correlation between the willingness to work and the job search activities ( $\alpha=.086$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and a significant correlation between the job search failure experience and the willingness to work ( $\alpha=-.205$ ,  $p<.05$ ). On the other hand, the adjusted parameter, which is recognizing the cause of job search failure, was statistically significant in relation to the job search failure experience ( $\alpha=.224$ ,  $p<.05$ ), to the willingness to work ( $\alpha=-.227$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

**Table 5.**  
Correlation Analysis Results between Variables (n=1,573).

Pearson Correlation	Job Search Activities	Job Search Failure Experience	Recognizing the Cause of Failure	Willingness to Work
Job Search Activities	1	-0.133*** (0.000)	0.034 (0.184)	0.086** (0.001)
Job Search Failure Experience	-0.133*** (.000)	1	0.224*** (0.000)	-0.205*** (0.000)
Recognizing the Cause of Failure	0.034 (0.184)	0.224*** (0.000)	1	-0.227*** (0.000)
Willingness to Work	0.086** (0.001)	-0.205*** (0.000)	-0.227*** (0.000)	1

Note: \*  $p<0.05$ , \*\*  $p<0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p<0.001$ .

#### 4.2. Analysis of Mediating Effect of Job Search Failure Experience

The results of Step 1~3, which was analyzing the effect of the job search activities on the College graduates' willingness to work through the mediation of job search failure experience, are shown in Table 6~Table8.

In Step 1, the job search activities had a effect on their experience of failing to find a job ( $\beta=.167$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

**Table 6.**  
The Influence of Job Search Activities on Job Search Failure Experience and Recognizing the Cause of Failure.

Variable		B1	S.E.	$\beta$	t	p
Job Search Failure Experience	(Constant)	4.88	0.556	-	8.774***	0.000
	Job Search Activities	-1.71	0.32	-0.133	-5.336***	0.000

Note: \*  $p<0.05$ , \*\*  $p<0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p<0.001$ .

In Step 2, the effect of the job search activities on the College graduates' willingness to work was analyzed. As shown in Table 7, it has a positive (+) effect ( $\beta=.86$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

**Table 7.**  
The Influence of Job Search Activities on Willingness to Work.

Variable		B1	S.E.	$\beta$	t	p
Willingness to Work	(Constant)	1.016	0.048	-	21.220***	0.000
	Job Search Activities	0.095	0.028	0.086	3.433**	0.001

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

In the last three-step parameter analysis, it was confirmed that the intention to work of college graduates had a 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 the job search activities had a significant effect on their willingness to work through the experience of failing to find a job.

**Table 8.**  
The Influence of Job Search Activities and Job Search Failure Experience on Willingness to Work.

Variable		B1	S.E.	$\beta$	t	p
Willingness to Work	(Constant)	1.099	0.048	-	22.837***	0.000
	Job Search Activities	0.066	0.027	0.060	2.410**	0.016
	Job Search Failure Experience	-0.017	0.002	-0.197	-7.933***	0.000

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

#### 4.3. Analysis of Mediating Effect of Recognizing the Cause of Failure

The results of Step 1~3, which was analyzing the effect of the job search failure experience on the College graduates' willingness to work through the mediation of the recognizing the cause of failure, are shown in Table 9~Table 11.

In Step 1, the job search failure experience had a positive(+) effect on their recognizing the cause of failure ( $\beta = .224$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

**Table 9.**  
The Influence of Job Search Activities on Job Search Failure Experience and Recognizing the Cause of Failure.

Variable		B1	S.E.	$\beta$	t	p
Recognizing the Cause of Failure	(Constant)	2.19	0.151	-	14.489***	0.000
	Search Failure Experience	0.283	0.031	0.224	9.114***	0.000

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

In Step 2, the effect of the job search failure experience on the college graduates' willingness to work was analyzed. As shown in Table 10, it has a effect ( $\beta = -.205$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

**Table 10.**  
The Influence of Job Search Activities on Willingness to Work.

Variable		B1	S.E.	$\beta$	t	p
Willingness to Work	(Constant)	1.212	0.010	-	117.527***	0.000
	Search Failure Experience	-0.018	0.002	-0.205	-8.317***	0.000

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

In the last three-step parameter analysis, it was confirmed that the job search failure experience had a partial-mediating effect by influencing their college graduates' willingness to work through the recognizing the cause of failure. As shown in Table 11, it was found that the job search failure experience had a significant effect on their willingness to work through the recognizing the cause of failure.



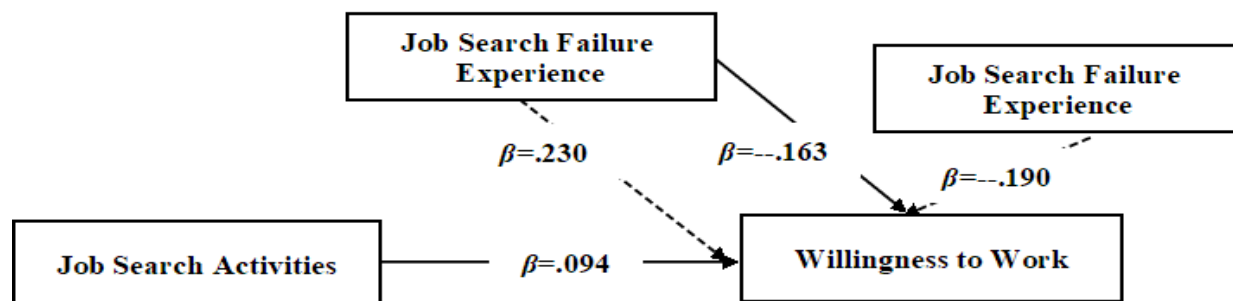
**Table 11.**  
The Influence of Job Search Activities and Job Search Failure Experience on Willingness to Work.

Variable		B1	S.E.	$\beta$	t	p
Willingness to Work	(Constant)	1.240	.011	-	115.015***	.000
	Search Failure Experience	-.014	.002	-.163	-6.537***	.000
	Recognizing the Cause of Failure	-.013	.002	-.190	-7.653***	.000

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

#### 4.4. Mediating Effect on Relationship between Job Searching Activities and Willingness to Work

In this study, the control parameter, the recognition the cause of failure, was statistically significant in relation to the relationship between the job search activities, job search failure experience, and willingness to work. In addition, the mediating effect model of the job search failure experience in relation to job search was found to be statistically significant. As shown in Figure 2, the independent variable, the job search activities, and the job search failure experience, both had a statistically significant effect on the dependent variable, which is the willingness to work. Specifically, it was found that the independent variable, the job search activities, had a static effect on the dependent variable, the willingness to work, while the independent variable, willingness to work, had a statistically significant static effect on the parameter of job search failure experience. In addition, it was analyzed that the job search failure experience, which is a parameter, had a positive effect on the dependent variable, the willingness to work. Additionally the research model was revised based on the results of of analyzing the partial-mediating effect of the recognizing the cause of failure in the relationship between the job search failure experience and the willingness to work.



**Figure 2.**

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

## 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 job search activities of college graduates had a statistically significant static effect on their experience of job search failure. In other words, the effort 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 job search activities does not decrease after experiencing job failure.

Second, it was confirmed that the job search activities had a positive effect on willingness of college graduates to work. 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 the job search activities and the willingness to work. According to this model, it can be seen that the job search activities of spec preparation and job search preparation causes the experience of job search failure, which in turn leads to willingness to work. Also, when job search fails, it is important to have a rational understanding of the cause for job search failure. This suggests that at the time of experiencing job search failure, feedback on job hunting activities and willingness to work 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.

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### **Transparency:**

The author confirms that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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