social sciences

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Responding to Precarity: Young People's Ambiguity Aversion, Resilience, and Coping Strategies

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Abstract

The nature of contemporary careers has shifted and is characterized by precarity, emphasizing the need for young people to possess adequate career resources in their pursuit of decent work. Grounded in the dual-process model and the conservation of resources (COR) theory, this study examines the loss impact caused by ambiguity aversion and low resilience on young people's responses to career ambiguity, specifically, their coping strategies (i.e., avoidance and approach) and career anxiety. In this cross-sectional study, we collected data using online surveys from young adults aged 18–35 (N = 156) in Norway, Indonesia, and Bangladesh. Serial mediation analyses were conducted using IBM-SPSS Statistics. Our findings found that ambiguity aversion had significant positive relations with career anxiety. Furthermore, resilience and avoidance coping were found to play mediating roles in the ambiguity aversion–career anxiety association. The results of the exploratory analyses also revealed significant differences in variable levels between the three countries examined. Our results have both theoretical and practical implications that contribute to the knowledge and practices in helping young people navigate the risks of precarity by developing adaptive career resources. We acknowledge the limitations regarding sample size and research design.

Keywords: ambiguity aversion; career anxiety; resilience; coping strategies; career precarity

Academic Editors: Norbert Ebert, Hangyoung Lee and Harry Blatterer

Received: 1 August 2025
Revised: 31 October 2025
Accepted: 11 November 2025
Published: 15 November 2025

Citation: Antonio, Audrey Ansay, Nadiyah Afifah Niigata Ramadhani, and Rita Chiesa. 2025. Responding to Precarity: Young People's Ambiguity Aversion, Resilience, and Coping Strategies. *Social Sciences* 14: 668. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci14110668

1. Introduction

Constant societal changes are unavoidable in the rapidly transforming technological and economic era of the twenty-first century, in which the global workforce has faced inevitable socioeconomic challenges (e.g., financial crisis) that caused substantial constraints in many areas of life (Skrbiš and Laughland-Booÿ 2019). For instance, the impact of work flexibilization, which has been a part of the labor market since the post-1992 period, is evolving rapidly and creating more non-conventional work opportunities that do not require stable contracts (Rydzik and Bal 2024). This flexibility that characterizes contemporary careers gives rise to increased precarity, especially for young people, who are confronting immense uncertainty regarding their career opportunities (Jemini-Gashi and Kadriu 2022; Kalleberg 2020). Young people are particularly vulnerable to precarious work, which is characterized by perceptions of uncertain, unpredictable, and risky employment (Kalleberg 2009). This is because they are more likely to engage in jobs that do not guarantee progression or social mobility (Nielsen et al. 2019). They are susceptible to risks of unemployment, temporary jobs, and skill-inadequate employment due to their limited work experiences and outsider positions in the labor market (Gangl 2002; Gebel 2015). Such exposure to

precarity has detrimental implications for young people's future outcomes. Rouvroye and Liefbroer (2023), for example, found precarious employment and lack of employment to be associated with higher life-course insecurity among young people in three to four life domains, namely, work, finances, partner and family, and leisure and personal development. This condition seems to affect young people all over the world. However, some constraints may differ due to economic, political, and historical backgrounds from where they were born and raised. Given the pertinence of this issue, it is important to examine the psychological and contextual factors that can impact young people's responses to precarity in their respective careers. Specifically, the current study intends to focus on ambiguity management in the career decision-making process. Career choices are crucial to give direction to one's professional development. In the past, the effectiveness of career decision-making was measured in terms of overcoming uncertainty. However, it is very hard to remove ambiguity when making career decisions nowadays, but it is possible to learn how to manage it and reduce its threat. Otherwise, attempts to eliminate ambiguity using maladaptive strategies may create additional problems for decision-makers.

Based on the principles of the dual-process model (Xu 2021) and the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll 2001), we expect young people to manage ambiguity by reducing or amplifying its negative effects depending on their attitudes and the resources they have at their disposal. According to the dual process theory, ambiguity aversion, or the tendency to fear and avoid ambiguity, can be detrimental to ambiguity management because it increases negative emotional reactions, such as career anxiety. This is particularly true when ambiguity cannot be eliminated, as is the case with contemporary career paths. The principle of primacy of resource loss in COR theory can contribute to understanding how ambiguity aversion increases career anxiety, affecting individuals' resilience and their subsequent coping strategies for embracing or avoiding uncertainty.

This study makes several contributions to social science literature. Firstly, it sheds light on ambiguity management, an inevitable aspect of career development, and a relatively new concept in career decision-making theory (Xu 2022). Secondly, it explores the role of personal resources such as resilience in managing ambiguity and, consequently, career anxiety. Thirdly, it reinforces the perspective of the resource loss/gain spiral (e.g., Hobfoll 1989) by investigating how ambiguity aversion influences the choice of approach or avoidance coping strategies. Lastly, the study provides insight into the role of context when exploring young people's responses to precarity by examining differences between countries in terms of ambiguity aversion, resilience, coping strategies, and career anxiety. On the one hand, we believe that managing ambiguity is essential to prevent negative career outcomes, such as career anxiety, which are caused by working conditions, regardless of the country in which people live. On the other hand, we expect cultural, social, and economic differences to affect our participants' access to resources and their approach to ambiguity. Data from Norway, Indonesia, and Bangladesh were analyzed.

1.1. Theoretical Framework

From a dual-process perspective (Xu 2021), embracing uncertainty in career choices involves both reducing confusion due to a lack of self-reflection and information about occupational opportunities and accepting ambiguity as an inevitable part of the complex and unpredictable process of career development. Ambiguity management concerns handling inherent uncertainty that cannot be eliminated by reducing the threat of ambiguity.

According to Xu (2023), people can approach or avoid ambiguity. Career ambiguity aversion is an orientation towards ambiguity management, defined as individuals' evaluations of and responses to unfamiliar, complex, or inconsistent information in career decision-making, which results in a malleable tendency to fear and avoid. It is the oppo-

site of calling and hope orientation, where individuals embrace ambiguity and engage in career decision-making by cultivating positive thoughts and affective reactions (Xu and Tracey 2015). Xu and Tracey (2015, 2017) argued that ambiguity can cause anxiety among decision-makers, particularly when they perceive any ambiguity in their decision-making process as a shortcoming. Staying away from ambiguity can lead to disengagement and procrastination in career decision-making, resulting in rushed or premature career choices that may be dysfunctional (Xu 2020). Xu (2023) suggested that individuals who are averse to ambiguity tend to perceive it as unacceptable and adopt a passive avoidance strategy to eliminate the anxiety and stress it causes (Buhr and Dugas 2006; Lipshits-Braziler et al. 2016). COR theory can contribute to understanding how ambiguity aversion can lead to higher levels of career-related anxiety.

The COR theory (Hobfoll 2001) is based on the fundamental idea that individuals strive to obtain, retain, and enhance resources they value to help them achieve their goals and satisfy their needs. Resources are defined as any objects, conditions, personal characteristics, and energy, as well as the methods to attain them. In the context of career development, career resources can be defined as anything that supports an individual in achieving their career goals (Halbesleben et al. 2014). Besides its emphasis on goal attainment, this theory is also applicable in understanding how individuals respond to stressful challenges (e.g., precarity), particularly in relation to their efforts to obtain and retain specific resources necessary for survival (Hobfoll et al. 2018).

COR theory also postulates several principles. Relevant to this study, The Primacy of Resource Loss principle implies that the experience of resource loss is more salient than the resource gain, indicating that losing resources has a greater psychological impact on individuals compared to the helpfulness of their effort to regain the resources (Hobfoll et al. 2018). The theory suggests that stress occurs when important resources are at risk of being lost, have already been lost, or cannot be acquired even after significant effort (Hobfoll 1989). Individuals with limited resources are more susceptible to experiencing resource loss, which can lead to a resource loss spiral (Hobfoll et al. 2018). This suggests that experiencing precarious working conditions can lead to a lack of resources, which can have a considerably detrimental effect on individuals' well-being. As resources are also used for both resolving and preventing resource loss, individuals with fewer resources become more vulnerable to psychological stress (Hobfoll 2001).

The principle of resource loss primacy in COR theory is expected to explain the psychological mechanism of why ambiguity might create significant distress, especially when individuals show a tendency to avoid it during career decision-making (Hobfoll et al. 2018). The ambiguity in career decision-making may threaten individuals' psychological resources by creating emotional strain, which is possibly manifested through career anxiety (Xu and Tracey 2015).

Hobfoll (2001) also postulates the Resource Investment principle, which emphasizes how beneficial it is for individuals to focus more on acquiring resources as "investment" to prevent or recover from the loss of resources. Through replacing or substituting the resources, individuals can reduce the negative psychological impact caused by resource loss. For instance, people can move from precarious to decent work by investing in personal resources to improve their situation. However, those experiencing resource depletion are more likely to engage in energy-conserving avoidance behaviors. This suggests that people who are averse to ambiguity can perceive certainty as a resource that is lacking in their careers. This may increase the perceived threat of losing further resources, and consequently, it may demotivate people from investing in additional resources to improve their working conditions. Unfortunately, this may activate the resource loss cycle, which

makes people who feel threatened by the prospect of losing resources more vulnerable to actually losing them and less capable of gaining new ones.

1.2. The Role of Resilience in Managing Ambiguity

In career development literature, resilience has often been approached by researchers in two ways. Firstly, resilience has been regarded as a trait or ability of an individual to recover from adversity such as career-related setbacks (Abu-Tineh 2011; Luthans et al. 2006). Secondly, resilience has been conceptualized as "a developmental process of persisting, adapting, and/or flourishing in one's career despite challenges, changing events, and disruptions over time" (Mishra and McDonald 2017, p. 216). This latter description considers the dynamic learning process that occurs in an individual's interaction with their environment, which makes them more resilient (Lengelle et al. 2017). In line with Mishra and McDonald's (2017) definition of resilience as an adaptive process, we expect ambiguity aversion to reduce resilience due to its association with the use of maladaptive strategies to relieve ambiguity-induced stress. Considering the complexity of the modern environment where careers develop and grow, resilience is argued to be an essential resource, especially for young people (Mishra and McDonald 2017). In addition to the capability to deal with stressful career circumstances (e.g., career transitions), resilience entails sustaining the individual's motivation to continue developing themselves regardless of the challenges and changes in the labor market (Pouyaud et al. 2017). Thus, as young people confront anticipated and unanticipated disruptions in their careers, resilience becomes their fundamental "meta competence" (Pouyaud et al. 2017), so they can cope with career-related risk factors caused by increasing labor market flexibility (Cascio 2007; Gu and Day 2013; Rossier et al. 2017).

Past research has emphasized the relevance of examining the phenomenon of resilience among individuals who face high risks. These include young people, who face precarious risks in the labor market (Rochat et al. 2017), and ambiguity-averse individuals, who demonstrate less openness, flexibility, and willingness to take risks during uncertain situations (Mishra and McDonald 2017). To understand why and how people differ in their capabilities to overcome adverse career-related circumstances, researchers have posited resilience as a protective factor (Pouyaud et al. 2017) that has been positively related to career self-management (Hirschi 2012) and career preparedness (Lent 2013). Resilience has also been argued to play a mediating role in the associations between adverse career-related situations (e.g., economic constraints, marginalization) and positive career outcomes (e.g., career transition to decent work; Rochat et al. 2017). In brief, resilience is highlighted as a meaningful resource that promotes young people's successful integration into the labor market despite unfavorable economic contexts (Kim and Lee 2018; Pérez-López et al. 2016). When this resource is lacking due to ambiguity aversion, individuals perceive a high risk of losing resources, which may increase their anxiety.

1.3. Responses to Career Ambiguity: Coping Strategies and Career Anxiety

During times of difficulty and stressful career decision-making, young people exhibit certain behaviors to evaluate and reduce their stress, employing either active (approach) or avoidant strategies (Boo and Kim 2020). Difficulties faced by young people can cause delays in initiating the decision-making process, interrupting it midway, or leading to non-optimal decisions (Gati et al. 1996). Hence, they need to cope effectively with the challenges of career decision-making (Frydenberg 2008).

A coping strategy is defined as a behavioral or cognitive effort to manage situations regarded as stressful through the management of specific external or internal needs that consume or exceed the resources an individual has. A prominent way of categorizing coping strategies considers two types, namely, avoidant and approach coping (Lazarus

and Folkman 1984). Avoidance coping, which involves cognitive and behavioral efforts oriented towards denying, minimizing, or otherwise avoiding dealing directly with stressful demands, has been closely linked to distress and depression (Penley et al. 2002). Conversely, approach coping is defined as actively moving towards a stressor to seek information, get social support, plan, and attempt to solve problems (Finset et al. 2002). In other words, approach coping involves taking an active step to resolve a specific circumstance causing stress or reducing the stress's effect on the individual, often using problem-focused strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984).

According to the dual-process model, managing ambiguity concerns approaching or avoiding it (Xu 2023). When people accept the inevitability of ambiguity, they engage in the anchoring and adjustment of the decision-making process. This begins with identifying a reasonable initial choice, which is then adjusted based on feedback from the attempt to implement it. Conversely, people who are averse to ambiguity tend to withdraw from or rush through career decision-making. This reduces their ability to accumulate resources from the adjustment process and consequently increases their perception of career choices as a threat. In the context of academic settings, intolerance of ambiguity has been strongly related to approach and avoidance coping strategies (Paralkar and Knutson 2021) and perceived stress and anxiety (Zuo 2023).

Even the definition of career anxiety associates this construct with the perception of ambiguity. Indeed, career anxiety refers to the negative affective constraint that an individual experiences during career decision-making and career development due to a state of uncertainty (Tsai et al. 2017). Similarly, Pisarik et al. (2017) defined career anxiety as a persistent feeling of apprehension or fear over the future that is job- or career-related. It can be manifested in physical, cognitive, and emotional terms at various levels through the individuals' lived experience (Pisarik et al. 2017). Saka et al. (2008) identified career anxiety as one of the three emotional aspects of career indecision that disrupts the career decision-making process when individuals worry about the uncertainty and potential outcomes. The relations between fear of uncertainty, intolerance for ambiguity, and career anxiety were often explained through an existential perspective in which lack of reality structure may enhance individuals' anxiety (Pisarik et al. 2017). Furthermore, highly adaptive students were found to be less anxious about their career, as they possess more psychological resources to overcome challenges (Boo et al. 2021).

We expect that people who suffer from the inevitability of ambiguous situations may enter a spiral of resource loss, in which perceiving ambiguity as a threat motivates people to adopt a defensive approach that limits the development of protective resources such as resilience and leads them to implement avoidance coping strategies. This, in turn, increases anxiety about future losses. On the contrary, when people embrace ambiguity as an inherent part of the career decision-making process, we expect that they will be able to activate the resources gain spiral. This is because they will be able to increase their resilience and use it to implement approach coping strategies that can reduce career anxiety.

1.4. Shared Versus Unique Country Contexts

The previous paragraphs provided a broad perspective on psychological resources and responses to ambiguity, referring to young people in general, regardless of context. This wide-ranging generalization about young people builds on the survey results of the International Labour Organization (2024) that found many young people feel pressured about job loss and stability. Additionally, Hofstede's (2011) cultural dimensions theory considers uncertainty avoidance to be an index of society's tolerance for ambiguity and therefore suggests that societal conceptualizations of ambiguity and avoidance can be viewed as a shared characteristic between countries. Based on these insights from the

International Labour Organization (2024) survey and cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede 2011), a common trend can be noted between the country contexts of Norway, Indonesia, and Bangladesh. To elaborate, in Norway, the results of the Working Life Barometer 2024 reported increasing fear of job loss among young Norwegian workers (Nordic Labour Journal 2024). In Indonesia, the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) described a concerning increase in unemployment from 7.20 million to 7.28 million people in May 2025, with workers belonging to the Generation Z cohort being the most affected compared to other age groups (Siwi and Kristianus 2025). At the same period, youth in Bangladesh are also revealed to be facing the same challenges as youth unemployment continues to rise more than double the national unemployment rate, according to a report released by the ILO (Financial Express 2025). Regarding the cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance, Norway, Indonesia, and Bangladesh were found to score within a similar range (Minkov and Kaasa 2022). These three countries were characterized as having a generally average range of uncertainty avoidance in comparison to other nations (Hofstede 2011).

Though these shared characteristics between Norway, Indonesia, and Bangladesh allow a hypothesized generalizability of the relations between young people's resources and responses to career ambiguity, the uniqueness of each country context cannot be disregarded. Indeed, previous studies have highlighted the differences between countries in relation to their economic conditions and cultural approaches to stress that can impact young people's experiences of insecurity and coping (e.g., Ding et al. 2021; Lai et al. 2020; László et al. 2010; Lawrie et al. 2019), For example, in relation to a country's institutional context, temporary workers in countries with stricter employment protection legislation (e.g., strong job security provisions for permanent contracts) were more likely to feel insecure than workers in other countries with a different legislation (e.g., Clark and Postel-Vinay 2009; Balz 2017). Among some contextual characteristics that distinguish the three countries in this study from each other are workers' transition rates from insecure to secure jobs (i.e., Norway; Muffels 2013), disparity issues in labor force participation (i.e., Bangladesh; Raihan 2016), and reports of underemployment and labor market segmentation (i.e., Indonesia; Allen 2016). The cultural theory of stress and coping (Chun et al. 2006) has also argued the difference in coping styles between individualist (e.g., Norway) and collectivist (e.g., Bangladesh, Indonesia) societies (Minkov and Kaasa 2022).

1.5. Present Study

In light of the risks that young people face in today's turbulent labor market, our study aimed to investigate the psychological mechanisms and contextual considerations that reinforce precarious work in the early stages of an individual's career. Based on the dual-process model (Xu 2021) and the principles of COR theory (Hobfoll 2001), we proposed a serial mediation model (see Figure 1) that considers an individual's tendency to reject ambiguity during career decision-making (i.e., career ambiguity aversion) and its implications on the negative reactions of young people to career precarity (i.e., career anxiety). In other words, career anxiety is viewed as a psychological cost of resource depletion when individuals cannot effectively manage ambiguous career information. As an indicator of the individual's limited resources to handle complex and unpredictable situations, ambiguity aversion is expected to deter young people's development of other career resources such as resilience (Hirschi 2012). Regarded as an essential psychological resource, resilience is hypothesized to regulate young people's anxious reactions, as well as their strategies to cope with career-related stressors (Antonio and Chiesa 2024). When ambiguity is perceived as unacceptable and resources are limited (e.g., ambiguity averse with low resilience), individuals are likelier to react in a more protective or avoidant manner during stressful situations (e.g., precarious employment conditions; Hobfoll et al. 2018).

Employing only avoidance coping strategies, however, restricts an individual's engagement to directly address the source of their anxiety (Ben-zur 2009). In such circumstances, approach coping strategies may play a more adaptive role in helping young people manage their anxiety about their career future (Chakraborty 2024). Building on these perspectives, we formulated the following hypotheses:

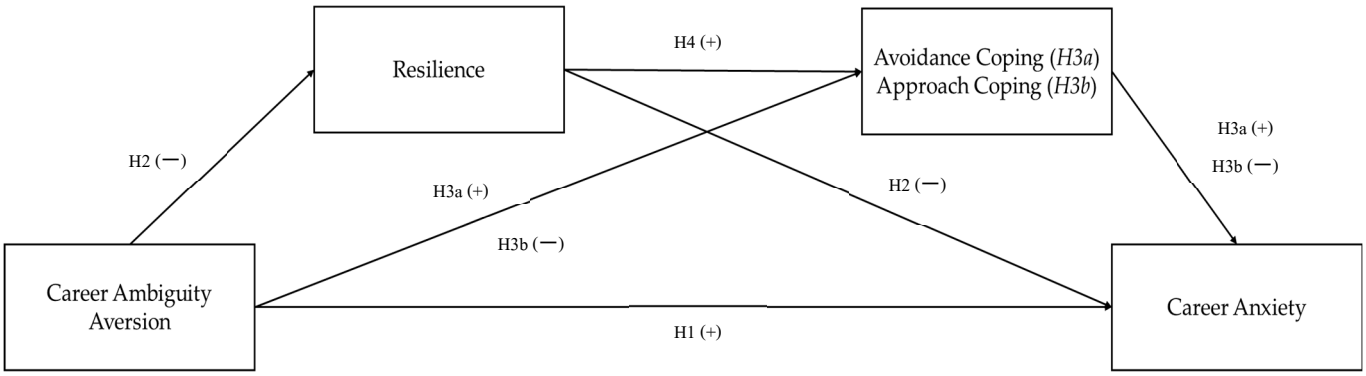

Figure 1. Hypothesized serial mediation model.

H1. *Career ambiguity aversion is expected to positively relate to career anxiety.*

H2. *Career ambiguity aversion is expected to be indirectly related to career anxiety through the mediating role of resilience. Specifically, career ambiguity aversion is expected to negatively relate to resilience, which, in turn, is expected to negatively relate to career anxiety.*

H3. *Career ambiguity aversion is expected to be indirectly related to career anxiety through the mediating role of avoidance and approach coping strategies.*

H3a. *Career ambiguity aversion is expected to positively relate to avoidance coping, which, in turn, is expected to positively relate to career anxiety.*

H3b. *Career ambiguity aversion is expected to negatively relate to approach coping, which, in turn, is expected to negatively relate to career anxiety.*

H4. *Career ambiguity aversion is expected to be indirectly related to career anxiety through the mediating roles of resilience and coping strategies in serial.*

Furthermore, in acknowledgement of the unique national context that can shape young people's resources and responses to career precarity, our study explored country differences in variable scores. By comparing the variable levels between each country included in this study, we probed into the significant implications that young people's environments can play, considering the psychological mechanism proposed in the serial mediation model. Thus, in addition to testing the previously explained hypotheses, our study attempted to address the following exploratory research question: "Is there a significant difference in the levels of career ambiguity aversion, resilience, avoidance coping, approach coping, and career anxiety observed between Norway, Indonesia, and Bangladesh?"

In summary of our present study, we found it meaningful to verify our hypotheses on the global sample because we consider the principles of the ambiguity management process as universal. At the same time, we also explore potential differences between countries in levels of the variables involved because we acknowledge the possible impact of different social, cultural, and economic factors that can affect young people's ambiguity management process and responses.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants and Procedure

The study sample consisted of 156 young adults, of whom 41% were Norwegians (n = 64), 39.7% were Indonesians (n = 62), and 19.2% were Bangladeshi (n = 30). Using G*Power 3.1.9.7 (Faul et al. 2009), the post hoc power analysis revealed that our study has 95% power to detect a medium effect size at α = 0.05 (Cohen 1988). The majority of the sample was composed of female participants (76.6%). The age range of the participants was from 18 to 35 years, with a mean age of 22.20 (SD = 3.43). Regarding the participants' level of education, 44.9% of the sample were reported to be university graduates (n = 70). During the period of data collection, more than half of the sample (55.8%) were reported to be actively seeking jobs (n = 87). In addition, 44.2% of the study participants were reported to be employed in different work contracts (n = 69). More details about the sample recruited from each country are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Study sample descriptives.

Sociodemographic Information		Total N = 156	Norway N = 64	Indonesia N = 62	Bangladesh N = 30
Gender (n)	Female	118	44	46	28
	Male	36	20	14	2
	No response	2		2	
Age	M (SD)	22.20 (3.43)	20.55 (0.92)	23.64 (4.62)	22.73 (2.30)
	Median	21	20	21	22
Studying	Yes	132	64	40	28
	No	24	0	22	2
University graduate	Yes	70	31	31	8
	No	86	33	31	22
Job searching	Yes	87	19	12	16
	No	69	45	50	14
Employed/working	Yes	69	40	26	3
	No	87	24	36	27
Unemployment rate			11.6	13.1	11.5

The authors received approval from the ethical committee of their institution to conduct this study. Employing a cross-sectional design, the researchers used Qualtrics to disseminate online survey questionnaires to a convenience sample of individuals who were contacted through the researchers' networks. Specifically, the researchers reached out to colleagues from Norway, Indonesia, and Bangladesh to contact local schools, universities, and workplaces to distribute the survey among interested young adults. The colleagues from each country also recruited participants through social media platforms (e.g., LinkedIn). Aside from the age range of 18–35 years that served as an inclusion criterion for study participation, no other inclusion or exclusion criteria were applied in relation to participants' gender, degree program, university background, or occupational status. Before participating in the study, the informed consent of all participants was collected, in which the study objectives and survey content were explained to their full understanding. In alignment with the recommendations of Kock et al. (2021) to control for common method bias, our survey design provided clear instructions and explanations to guarantee the anonymity of participants' responses. Aspects of psychological and methodological separations were also implemented in the survey design (i.e., the presentation of the dependent variable preceded the independent variable, and different response scale formats were used as detailed in the next paragraphs; Kock et al. 2021). Harman's single-factor test was also performed as a statistical control to identify potential common method bias. The test results revealed that the first factor explained only 16.87% of the variance, suggesting low implications of

common method bias in the present study. In addition to the measures described below, the survey included sociodemographic questions, which inquired about participants' age, gender, education, and employment status.

2.2. Measures

We collected data from participants using four different instruments: the Career Decision Ambiguity Tolerance Scale (Xu and Tracey 2015), the Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al. 2008), the Brief COPE scale (Carver 1997), and the Career Anxiety Scale (Tsai et al. 2017). We used the original English version of all the instruments to collect data from the Norwegian and Bangladeshi participants. For Indonesian participants, these instruments were translated into their local language for the data collection. Specifically, we used a back-translation method in which the original versions of the scales were translated into Indonesian by native speakers and then translated back into English, with the final translations checked by English speakers (more information on the Indonesian measures can be found in the Supplementary Materials). The corresponding paragraph for each measure indicates the validation studies that are available for specific country contexts. The results of our previous study have also confirmed the factor structure and satisfactory model fit of all the measures used for each country. Furthermore, we were able to establish measurement invariance across the three countries in the said study, where we assessed the same constructs and found similar conceptualizations among young people from Norway, Indonesia, and Bangladesh. More information regarding the results of the confirmatory factor analyses performed in each country, as well as the tests for measurement invariance, can be found in the Supplementary Materials. The succeeding texts detail the factor structure and reliability coefficient of each measure for the present study's overall sample.

2.2.1. Career Ambiguity Aversion

Xu and Tracey (2015) developed the Career Decision Ambiguity Tolerance (CDAT) Scale to assess individuals' evaluations of and responses to ambiguity in career decision-making. It consists of three subscales, namely, preference, tolerance, and aversion. A previous study conducted in Indonesia by Sawitri et al. (2023) reported good model fit indices (i.e., CFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.04). In this study, we only used the aversion subscale, which consists of 6 items with a response scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An example item is, "I try to avoid complicated career decision-making tasks". We conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test its factor structure, and we found the scale's one-dimensionality to be adequate: CFI = 0.97; SRMR = 0.04; RMSEA = 0.07 (95% CI [0.00, 0.12]). A reliability test was conducted for the Career Ambiguity Aversion scale, yielding a Cronbach's α of 0.80.

2.2.2. Resilience

We used the Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al. 2008) to measure resilience levels. A validation study by Zhou and Ma (2025) reported good model fit for the Norwegian sample (CFI = 0.99, SRMR = 0.02, RMSEA = 0.05). It consisted of 5 items, with a response scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (e.g., "I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times") and reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.70. The scale's one-dimensionality was adequate: CFI = 0.99; SRMR = 0.03; RMSEA = 0.06 (95% CI [0.00, 0.16]).

2.2.3. Coping Strategies

The Brief Cope scale was developed by Carver (1997) to provide a more concise measurement of coping strategies compared to other scales. This scale aimed to measure both avoidance and approach coping with 24 items. Previous studies by Huda et al. (2022)

found good model fit for the translated version of this scale in Indonesian (CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.08).

Twelve items were used to measure avoidance coping, with six dimensions investigated, namely, humor, behavioral disengagement, denial, self-blame, self-distraction, and venting. An example item for this scale is, "I have been turning to work or other activities to take my mind off things". Testing for a one-factor model, the results showed a generally acceptable fit, CFI = 0.95; SRMR = 0.08; RMSEA = 0.05 (95% CI [0.01, 0.08]). Additionally, this scale demonstrated adequate internal reliability (Cronbach's α = 0.73).

For approach coping, 12 items were used to measure six dimensions, namely, use of emotional support, use of instrumental support, positive reframing, acceptance, active coping, and planning. An example item is, "I've been concentrating my efforts on doing something about the situation I'm in". This scale showed excellent internal reliability (Cronbach α = 0.85). With CFA, we tested for a one-factor model and found a generally acceptable fit, CFI = 0.94; SRMR = 0.06; RMSEA = 0.06 (95% CI [0.04, 0.09]).

For both avoidance and approaching coping measures, a 4-point Likert scale was adapted for the questionnaire (1 = I haven't been doing this at all; 4 = I've been doing this a lot).

2.2.4. Career Anxiety

The career anxiety scale was developed by Tsai et al. (2017) to understand the career anxiety of tourism and hospitality graduates. In our study, we used two out of the original four subscales to measure career anxiety regarding the employment environment and professional education and training, with a response scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The employment environment subscale consists of five items, whereas the professional education subscale comprise four items. An example item is, "I worry about future employment because of a potential economic recession". With CFA, we tested for a one-factor model, CFI = 0.93; SRMR = 0.05; RMSEA = 0.09 (95% CI [0.06, 0.12]). Though the RMSEA value is higher than the recommended threshold, the other resulting indices were still satisfactory, indicating the model's acceptable fit for our study. This scale also demonstrated excellent internal reliability (Cronbach's α = 0.89).

2.2.5. Control Variables

In testing our hypothesized research model, we controlled for age, gender, and unemployment rates of each country included in the study. National unemployment indexes were obtained from the Worldbank (2025) database and served as a macro-level variable that enhanced the contextual insights of our analyses.

2.3. Statistical Analysis

We employed five different measurement scales and verified their validity and reliability. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), a statistical technique used to verify the factor structure of a measurement instrument, was conducted using Jamovi software version 2.7.12. The following model fit indices and threshold values were considered to evaluate the goodness-of-fit: Comparative Fit Index (CFI) $\geq$ 0.90; Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) $\leq$ 0.08; RMSEA (Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation) $\leq$ 0.08 (Hu and Bentler 1999). Measurement invariance was evaluated by performing multigroup CFA on Mplus (Muthén and Muthén 2017) and using the recommend criteria on absolute fit and alternative fit indices (Chen 2007; Darwish et al. 2024; Putnick and Bornstein 2016; see Supplementary Materials). We also used IBM-SPSS version 27 to perform different tests in our study. Specifically, reliability tests were conducted to obtain Cronbach's α, Harman's single factor test was performed to control for common method bias, and preliminary analyses were executed to obtain descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations.

In addition to multiple regression tests, serial mediation analysis was used to examine sequential relationships (i.e., based on the orders of variables) between multiple mediators to explain how an independent variable influences a dependent variable (Hayes 2018). The "PROCESS" macro, model 6 (Hayes 2018), with bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals (CI; n = 5000), was employed to test the significance of the indirect effects. The effects were considered significant if the 95% bootstrap CI excludes zero. Lastly, the Kruskal–Wallis H Test with post hoc analysis was performed to compare variable levels between each country group. Considering the cross-sectional design of our study, we further evaluated the fit and appropriateness of our research model by contrasting it against two alternative models, which we report in the Supplementary Materials.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations for each variable of the total sample and country subsamples. According to Field (2009), relatively small standard deviations in comparison to the mean score connote a meaningful and accurate descriptor of the data. Table 2 also reports the correlation of measured variables. Interestingly, both career ambiguity aversion and career anxiety showed significant correlations with the other variables, except for approach coping. Surprisingly, even though resilience was found to be negatively correlated with career ambiguity aversion and career anxiety, it was not significantly correlated with both coping strategies. For the correlation results with the other control variables of the study, please see Table A1 in the Appendix A.

Table 2. Variable means, standard deviations, and correlations.

	Variables	Total N = 156 M (SD)	NO n = 64 M (SD)	ID n = 62 M (SD)	BD n = 30 M (SD)	Age	Gender	UR	1	2	3	4
1	Career ambiguity aversion	3.11 (0.77)	2.91 (0.58)	3.20 (0.88)	3.13 (0.83)	−0.18 *	0.09	0.19 *				
2	Resilience	3.26 (0.72)	3.48 (0.73)	3.19 (0.69)	2.89 (0.59)	−0.02	−0.07	−0.05	−0.38 *			
3	Avoidance coping	2.49 (0.47)	2.44 (0.46)	2.64 (0.41)	2.32 (0.52)	0.02	0.14	0.25 **	0.35 **	−0.16		
4	Approach coping	3.01 (0.53)	2.89 (0.52)	3.20 (0.44)	2.86 (0.60)	0.23 **	0.08	0.29 **	0.12	0.05	0.43 **	
5	Career anxiety	3.03 (0.84)	2.75 (0.78)	3.31 (0.85)	3.07 (0.80)	−0.13	0.27 **	0.26 **	0.56 **	−0.43 **	0.33 **	0.07

NO = Norway; ID = Indonesia; BD = Bangladesh; UR = Unemployment Rate; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

3.2. Hypotheses Testing

We tested our four main hypotheses starting from H1, which expected a positive direct relationship between career ambiguity aversion and career anxiety. Career ambiguity aversion was found to have a positive direct relation with career anxiety, both Model 1 (B = 0.41, 95% CI [0.25, 0.57]) and Model 2 (B = 0.44, 95% CI [0.28, 0.60]), supporting H1. This finding indicates that individuals who exhibit higher aversion toward career-related uncertainty are more likely to experience elevated levels of career anxiety.

In H2, we expected career ambiguity aversion to have a significant indirect effect on career anxiety via the mediating role of resilience. Consistent with our hypothesis, career ambiguity aversion was negatively related to resilience (B = −0.40, 95% CI [−0.54, −0.25]), indicating that ambiguity-averse individuals tended to exhibit lower levels of resilience. Resilience was negatively related to career anxiety in Model 1 (B = −0.29, 95% CI [−0.45, −0.14]) and Model 2 (B = −0.30, 95% CI [−0.46, −0.14]), suggesting that higher resilience corresponded with lower career anxiety. The indirect effect of career ambiguity aversion on

career anxiety via resilience was significant in both models (B = 0.10, 95% CI [0.04, 0.19]), supporting H2.

In H3, we expected career ambiguity aversion to have a significant indirect effect on career anxiety via the mediating roles of avoidance coping (H3a) and approach coping (H3b). In support of H3a, career ambiguity aversion was positively related to avoidance coping (B = 0.17, 95% CI [0.07, 0.28]), and avoidance coping was positively related to career anxiety (B = 0.22, 95% CI [0.02, 0.45]). This result indicates that individuals who were more averse to career ambiguity tended to use avoidance coping strategies more often, which was linked to higher levels of career anxiety. The indirect effect of career ambiguity aversion on career anxiety via avoidance coping was significant (B = 0.03, 95% CI [0.00, 0.09]). The study results, however, failed to support H3b. Career ambiguity aversion was not significantly related to approach coping (B = 0.11, 95% CI [−0.01, 0.23]), and approach coping was not significantly related to career anxiety (B = 0.01, 95% CI [−0.19, 0.22]). The indirect effect of career ambiguity aversion on career anxiety via approach coping was not significant (B = 0.00, 95% CI [–0.02, 0.03]). Taken together, these findings partially support H3, indicating that avoidance coping, but not approach coping, mediates the relationship between career ambiguity aversion and career anxiety.

In H4, we expected career ambiguity aversion to have a significant indirect effect on career anxiety via the mediating roles of resilience and coping strategies (avoidance and approach) serially. In Model 1, resilience was not significantly related to avoidance coping (B = −0.02, 95% CI [−0.13, 0.08]). Furthermore, the indirect effect of career ambiguity aversion on career anxiety via the serial mediation of resilience and avoidance coping was not significant (B = 0.00, 95% CI [−0.01, 0.01]). In Model 2, resilience was not significantly related to approach coping (B = 0.09, 95% CI [−0.03, 0.21]). Furthermore, the indirect effect of career ambiguity aversion on career anxiety via the serial mediation of resilience and approach coping was not significant B = 0.00, 95% CI [–0.01, 0.01]). In summary, our findings for both Models 1 and 2 failed to support H4. Overall, these results indicate that resilience and coping strategies did not operate together serially to explain the link between career ambiguity aversion and career anxiety. Table 3 reports the statistical results for all the hypotheses tested.

Table 3. Unstandardized regression coefficient, direct and indirect effects.

	Avoidance Coping (Model 1)				Approach Coping (Model 2)			
			CI (95%)				CI (95%)	
	B	*SE*	Lower	Upper	*B*	*SE*	Lower	Upper
Direct effects								
Career Ambiguity Aversion → Career Anxiety	0.41 **	0.08	0.25	0.57	0.44 **	0.08	0.28	0.60
Career Ambiguity Aversion → Resilience	−0.40 **	0.07	−0.54	−0.25	−0.40 **	0.07	−0.54	−0.25
Career Ambiguity Aversion → Coping	0.17 **	0.05	0.07	0.28	0.11	0.06	−0.01	0.23
Resilience → Career Anxiety	−0.29 **	0.08	−0.45	−0.14	−0.30 **	0.08	−0.46	−0.14
Coping → Career Anxiety	0.22 *	0.12	0.02	00.45	0.01	0.10	−0.19	0.22
Resilience → Coping	−0.02	0.05	−0.13	0.08	0.09	0.06	−0.03	0.21
Indirect effects								
Career Ambiguity Aversion → Resilience → Career Anxiety	0.10 **	0.04	0.04	0.19	0.10 **	0.04	0.04	0.19
Career Ambiguity Aversion → Coping → Career Anxiety	0.03 *	0.02	0.00	0.091	0.00	0.01	−0.02	0.03
Career Ambiguity Aversion → Resilience → Coping → Career Anxiety	0.00	0.00	−0.01	0.01	0.00	0.00	−0.01	0.01
Total effects								
Career Ambiguity Aversion → Career Anxiety	0.56 **	0.08	0.41	0.71	0.56 **	0.08	0.41	0.71
R^2	0.38				0.38			

N = 154; CI = Confidence Interval; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.001$.

3.3. Exploratory Analyses

In relation to the exploratory research question of this study regarding the differences in variable levels between Norway, Indonesia, and Bangladesh, Table 4 reports the results of the Kruskal–Wallis test. Significant country differences were found among the variables of this study: career ambiguity aversion ($\chi^2 = 8.06$, $p < 0.05$); resilience ($\chi^2 = 13.67$, $p < 0.001$); avoidance coping ($\chi^2 = 8.79$, $p < 0.05$); approach coping ($\chi^2 = 12.8$, $p < 0.05$); career anxiety ($\chi^2 = 12.52$, $p < 0.001$). Further analyses using Bonferroni-Dunn post hoc tests revealed that career ambiguity aversion was significantly higher in Indonesia than in Norway ($p < 0.001$), and resilience was significantly higher in Norway than in Bangladesh ($p < 0.001$). For both avoidance coping ($p < 0.05$) and approach coping ($p < 0.001$), these variables were found to be significantly higher in Indonesia than in Norway. Similarly, both coping strategies were again found to be significantly higher in Indonesia than in Bangladesh ($p < 0.05$). Lastly, career anxiety was found to be significantly higher in Indonesia than in Norway ($p < 0.001$). Overall, these findings indicate that some differences between countries exist in relation to individual levels of coping, resilience, and career-related attitudes.

Table 4. Kruskal–Wallis and Bonferroni-Dunn post hoc test results for country groups.

Variable	χ^2	NO Mean Rank	ID Mean Rank	BD Mean Rank	Pairwise Comparisons [a]		
					NO—ID	NO—BD	ID—BD
Career ambiguity aversion	8.06 *	67.38	90.15	78.15	22.78 ** (8.03)	10.78 (9.97)	−12.00 (10.02)
Resilience	13.67 **	92.01	75.54	55.80	−16.47 (8.02)	−36.21 ** (9.96)	−19.74 (10.01)
Avoidance coping	8.79 *	72.21	91.33	65.40	19.12 * (8.04)	−6.81 (9.98)	−25.93 * (10.03)
Approach coping	12.8 **	67.70	94.43	68.63	26.73 ** (8.04)	0.94 (9.98)	−25.79 * (10.03)
Career anxiety	12.52 **	64.02	92.37	80.72	28.35 ** (8.04)	16.69 (9.98)	−11.65 (10.04)

NO = Norway. ID = Indonesia. BD = Bangladesh. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.001$. [a] The mean differences between groups are reported as top values, and the standard errors are reported as bottom values.

4. Discussion

This study examined the associations between career ambiguity aversion, resilience, coping strategies, and career anxiety through a serial mediation model that hypothesized the psychological mechanism of young people's resources and responses to precarity. The study hypotheses were developed in consideration of the principles of the dual-process model (Xu 2021) and COR theory (Hobfoll 1989), which argued that ambiguity aversion can contribute to young people's negative responses to precarity (i.e., avoidance coping, career anxiety). Whereas psychological resources (i.e., resilience) can be utilized to reduce this effect and promote adaptive responses (e.g., approach coping) among young people (Hobfoll et al. 2018). Additionally, this study explored the significance of context in young people's resources and responses to precarity by comparing the variable levels between three countries, namely, Norway, Indonesia, and Bangladesh. Several key findings emerged from the results.

4.1. Relations Between Career Ambiguity Aversion, Career Anxiety, Resilience, and Coping Strategies

The first important finding of our research is the significant positive relation between career ambiguity aversion and career anxiety, consistent with H1. Aligning with the dual-process perspective (Xu 2021), our study observed the tendency of young people, who

have difficulty accepting ambiguity, to be more anxious in situations where ambiguity cannot be eliminated, which is the case of contemporary career paths. This finding can also be interpreted based on the COR theory's principle of "loss primacy" (Hobfoll 2001), in which the lack of certainty in one's career threatens resource loss among ambiguity-averse individuals, leading to their career anxiety. This notion is supported by our study's second important finding, which highlighted the significant mediating role of resilience in the relationship between ambiguity aversion and career anxiety, supporting H2. This result demonstrates that ambiguity aversion hinders the development of young people's resilience, or their "process of persisting, adapting, and/or flourishing in one's career despite challenges, changing events, and disruptions over time" (Mishra and McDonald 2017, p. 216), which increases their career anxiety.

In relation to the mediating role of coping that was expected by H3, we obtained different results concerning approach and avoidance strategies. Specifically, avoidance coping was found to mediate this relationship (H3a), whereas approach coping did not (H3b). These findings imply that ambiguity-averse individuals may feel uncomfortable directly confronting or engaging with career-related stressors, which, in turn, increases their anxiety about their future career outcomes. It also aligns with the results of past studies that found avoidance strategies, which focus on conserving one's resources by evading the source of stress, can increase the detrimental outcomes experienced by an individual (Ben-zur 2009; Hobfoll et al. 2018). Conversely, approach coping did not show any relationship with either ambiguity aversion or career anxiety. This finding was unexpected, especially considering the correlation results that found significant positive relations between avoidance and approach coping. In general, coping is regarded as a multidimensional construct with higher order factors (Carver et al. 1989; Skinner et al. 2003) that can be distinguished as avoidance and approach to theoretically integrate the individual's emotions, motivation, and personality in the coping process (Carver et al. 2000). In response to their appraisals of stress (Lazarus and Folkman 1984), individuals can interdependently employ both avoidance and approach coping strategies as a means of adaptation to regulate the different emotions arising from a situation and to achieve their goals (e.g., career goals; Duhachek and Oakley 2007; Skinner et al. 2003). Each coping strategy, however, has been associated with specific emotions and orientations in relation to a stressor (Roth and Cohen 1986). In particular, individuals have been found to use more avoidance coping when responding to fear (e.g., aversion to ambiguity; Duhachek and Oakley 2007).

These mixed findings on the mediating roles of coping strategies can also be interpreted by considering two mechanisms that can occur when coping with ambiguity in the career decision-making process (Xu 2023). The first mechanism is based on ambiguity aversion, leading to the adoption of avoidance coping strategies, which have a negative impact on career outcomes (e.g., career anxiety). The second mechanism could be activated by hope or calling, which is postulated to help individuals navigate ambiguity and achieve a career direction (Xu 2023), which can increase the use of approach coping strategies and reduce career anxiety. This perspective aligns with arguments of the resources gain spiral (Hobfoll 2001): those who have more resources are more likely to invest them to gain new ones and, consequently, are more effective in preventing negative emotional outcomes of stress, such as career anxiety. Future research should consider the impact of hope and calling, in addition to ambiguity aversion, on the ambiguity management process.

In relation to the serial mediation model (H4), contrary to our expectations, the hypothesis was not supported by the results. Quite surprisingly, resilience was not significantly associated with any of the two coping strategies. One possible explanation is the presence of other factors that might be more significant than resilience in influencing the participants' choice of coping strategy. Boo and Kim (2020) mention factors such as decision status,

perceived decisional difficulties, and decisional stress, which influence how undergraduate students perceive difficulties and use certain coping strategies. Additionally, in their current career stage, young people's level of resilience with the labor market and workplace may still be underdeveloped, making it ineffective in the coping strategies they adopt. Mishra and McDonald (2017) also highlighted the important notion of time in the conceptualization of resilience, which is considered a process of development. In other words, a reciprocal relationship between resilience and coping can be viewed in which one variable influences the other's development (e.g., resilience leads to adaptive coping, which can further build an individual's resilience that may promote more adaptive coping; Seibert et al. 2016). From this perspective, the serial mediation effect of resilience and coping strategies may become more apparent if observed and measured across different points in time. In general, we may consider the mechanism of the career ambiguity aversion-career anxiety relationship to be more complex and involve other variables aside from resilience and coping strategies. Considering the process of career decision-making can entail individuals taking many different and connected information simultaneously (Budner 1962), the effect of ambiguity aversion on career-related anxiety may indeed be more multifaceted than initially assumed. In summary of our research model, our study findings contribute to the understanding of the ambiguity management process by describing the mechanisms that can increase young people's career anxiety in light of their aversive orientation to ambiguity. Integrating the perspectives of the dual-process model (Xu 2021) and resource theories (Hirschi 2012; Hobfoll 2001), our research highlights the negative implications that a strong dislike of ambiguity can bring to young people. By making them less resilient and more avoidant in the modern work environment, career ambiguity aversion can lead to worsening feelings of anxiety among young people regarding their future employment and work conditions.

4.2. Country Differences in Career Ambiguity Aversion, Career Anxiety, Resilience, and Coping Strategies

In relation to the study's exploratory research question on potential variable differences between countries, the results of the Kruskal–Wallis and post hoc tests provide interesting insights that contextualize ambiguity aversion and young people's responses to it. Viewing these findings as a basis or point of reference upon which future research can build, we elaborate further on these results. Foremost, this study's Norwegian participants were characterized to have lower levels of career ambiguity aversion and career anxiety, as well as higher levels of resilience. This finding can be interpreted considering the reported institutional and educational resources that are made available to young Norwegians (Nilsen 2005) and can play a role in reinforcing their psychological resources and limiting their negative responses to precarity. The Norwegian subsample of this study is also composed of a relatively high number of people who study and work simultaneously, which allows them access to the mentioned institutional and educational resources. In addition, given that gender was significantly correlated with career anxiety in our results, the relatively higher rate of males (31%) in the Norwegian subsample in comparison with the Indonesian (22%) and Bangladeshi (7%) groups may have affected this finding.

The study results also implied a relatively less comfortable situation among Indonesian participants, in which they displayed higher levels of career ambiguity aversion, avoidance coping, and career anxiety compared to the Norwegian and Bangladeshi subsamples. These results can be interpreted in light of macroeconomic factors, which have previously characterized workers in developing countries as risk-averse (Takahashi 2013), and labor market oversupply issues (Widya Permata Yasih 2024), which may contribute to the career anxiety of the study participants. Indirect confirmation of the impact of labor market issues can be attributed to the unemployment rate index, which we considered as a control variable in the present study and which we found to be higher in Indonesia compared to

other countries. This index was also positively associated with career ambiguity aversion, avoidance coping, and career anxiety. Furthermore, the collectivist culture of Indonesia may also play a role in the adoption of avoidance coping strategies that align with the maintenance of societal and group harmony when confronting issues (Chun et al. 2006). Xu (2021) suggested that acceptance-oriented Eastern cultural traditions emphasize accepting and adapting to existential life challenges as opposed to eliminating such challenges. This orientation could explain why the study's young Indonesian subsample demonstrated higher levels of approach coping, too.

Bangladesh is also characterized by a collectivist culture similar to Indonesia (Minkov and Kaasa 2022), but the scores of the Bangladeshi participants in our study showed more similarities with the Norwegian participants than with the Indonesian participants. This finding suggests that other factors may play a more significant role beyond the comparison between Eastern and Western cultures. For instance, an interesting characteristic of our study's Indonesian participants was the older mean age of the subsample in contrast to the other two country groups. As people get older, they may become more intolerant of ambiguity and motivated to improve their working conditions. Lastly, the Bangladeshi participants showed generally lower levels of resilience in contrast to the Norwegian participants, and they also demonstrated lower levels of avoidance coping and approach coping compared to the Indonesian participants. As most of them were studying without work commitments during the period of data collection, they did not yet possess the necessary knowledge or experience to build the resilience and coping strategies required to address career-related issues. In any case, low levels of resilience should not be ignored as this could serve as an essential for them amidst the risks of the informal economy that young people face in Bangladesh (Raihan 2016).

4.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Several limitations should be noted that future studies may improve upon. Foremost is the limitation regarding our sample size, as it was intended to represent certain groups (e.g., subsamples in each country) but failed to fully capture the diversity of the national populations. This limitation restricts the extent to which our findings can be generalized across broader national contexts. Future studies can employ larger sample sizes and attain higher statistical power to perform other types of statistical analyses (e.g., analysis of variance, full structural equation modeling). Improving the study methodology in such a manner with more representative country samples would enable deeper exploration and investigation of national differences and variable relationships.

The lack of local validation studies among some measures used in our study is also a limitation that needs to be considered. Though our CFA and tests for measurement invariance demonstrated acceptable fit to assess our study constructs across three countries, the cross-cultural validation of the scales is still necessary to better assess the psychometric properties of the adapted scales in each local context. We also acknowledge the limitation of this study's cross-sectional design, which prevents the causal interpretation of our results. This study design only allowed us to examine variable relationships at only one time point instead of at multiple waves, when the nature of these associations may significantly change. Furthermore, even though we followed certain recommendations to address common method bias in our study, this issue cannot be entirely discounted. Thus, we suggest future researchers to carry out more robust research designs in response to our study limitations. For instance, longitudinal research can be conducted to reassess our study findings in which an antecedent preceding a cross-time change in an outcome can help illustrate the causal explanation of variable relationships (Taris et al. 2021). Our study's

use of self-report measures also introduces the risk of self-report bias, suggesting the need for methodological diversification in future studies.

Further research can also assess the impact of certain cultural (e.g., collectivism) and institutional (e.g., labor market policies) factors in the serial mediation model tested in this study. In doing so, they can better elaborate on the possible interplay between psychological and contextual factors. In addition to longitudinal studies, qualitative research can be performed to bring more clarity about the resources, experiences, or events that help young people mitigate the risks of precarity during the initial stages of their career development. More comparative studies can be carried out as well to continue this study's assessment regarding the impact of context on young people's careers. Culture, for instance, has been argued to influence individual views, attitudes, and beliefs, in addition to legitimizing career behaviors, values, and standards (Khapova et al. 2012; Thomas and Inkson 2007). Succeeding studies can consider cultural differences such as how society is able to deal with future uncertainty by avoiding risk and showing more preference for security and safety (Hofstede 2011). In summary, by going beyond a single cultural context, future studies can aim to examine early career precarity across different cultures as a means of extrapolating and distinguishing the contextual factors that need to be addressed for young people's development.

4.4. Implications

In today's context of economic changes and technological breakthroughs that increasingly affect young people's risks of precarity, the career ambiguity management process needs attention from scholars and practitioners. In general, understanding how young people navigate ambiguity and its relationship to career anxiety is a relevant theme in career studies and practice. The theoretical implications of this study are multifaceted. Firstly, our findings on the significant relationship between career ambiguity aversion and career anxiety laid a foundation for understanding how attitudes towards ambiguity can impact the way individuals respond to career-related worries and apprehensions. This research highlights the anxiety that can consume young adults who dread and avoid ambiguity in the early stages of career development. Secondly, by examining the mediating roles of resilience and coping strategies, we gained some insights regarding the complexity of the relationship between career ambiguity aversion and career anxiety. Our findings suggest that ambiguity averse individuals may either experience difficulties in building adaptive psychological resources (e.g., resilience) or rely on avoidant responses that increase their anxious states about their future career. Considering the few existing research that have examined these constructs in the context of young people's precarious careers, our study contributes to the understanding of the mechanism that underly early career individuals' attitude and receptiveness to the modern career environment. Thirdly, our findings support the notion that coping is a multidimensional response to career stress, contributing to a more nuanced perspective of how different types of career-related distress led to specific coping strategies, as outlined in the transactional model of stress and coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). The current study aligns with previous research by Fris et al. (2024) that found different dynamics between avoidance-oriented and approach-oriented career behavior among individuals facing career shock during the COVID-19 pandemic. In line with COR theory, our findings suggest that the link between ambiguity aversion, avoidance coping, and career anxiety is based on a mechanism of a resources loss spiral. Conversely, the lack of a relationship between ambiguity aversion and approach coping calls for further research into the drivers of the resources gain spiral. Fourthly, our findings echo the arguments of career theorists that emphasize the importance of accounting for the contextual

environment in the research of individual career development (e.g., De Vos et al. 2020; Lent and Brown 2013).

Practically, this study contributes to understanding how to prevent the negative psychological impact of work precarity. While social and economic policies should address structural labor market issues that limit young people's access to decent work, education, and youth policies should encourage young people to develop adaptive strategies for dealing with ambiguity. Ambiguity is not necessarily an obstacle to be removed, but rather an inherent part of the career decision-making process. Accepting ambiguity means opening yourself up to a world of possibilities and opportunities. Conversely, ambiguity aversion can trigger a passive attitude that depletes the individual's psychological resources. The study suggests that cultural and contextual factors can play a role in managing young people's ambiguity aversion. Thus, we encourage public authorities to update and strengthen career education programs, starting from high school, to train young people to develop flexible career plans while maintaining a sense of direction and purpose in relation to their goals. In addition to primary prevention, extensive efforts should be dedicated to secondary prevention. Young workers in precarious circumstances are at risk of falling into a negative spiral of losing resources, meaning they may no longer be able to escape their precarious situation due to a lack of personal resources. They would greatly benefit from interventions that address their career ambiguity management. Specifically, active labor market programs should include training initiatives to discourage the use of avoidant strategies in response to the career stressors that young and vulnerable people encounter when planning for their future or making career decisions. For example, resilience training can help break the cycle of losing resources due to exposure to precarious work and support individuals in their pursuit of decent work opportunities.

5. Conclusions

This study considered precarity at work from a psychological and contextual perspective. Specifically, we investigated the relationships between career ambiguity aversion and career anxiety through the mediation of resilience and coping strategies (i.e., avoidance and approach coping) among young people in Norway, Indonesia, and Bangladesh. Our findings confirmed that aversion to ambiguity significantly heightens an individual's experience of career anxiety by undermining their resilience or reinforcing avoidance coping behaviors. Moreover, differences were observed in the variable levels across three national contexts, highlighting the significance of socioeconomic and cultural environments on young people's resources and responses to precarity.

In summary, our study underscored young people's attitude toward ambiguity amidst the risks of precarious employment that surround fresh graduates, labor market entrants, and inexperienced workers in different countries. Our study findings highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions such as resilience-building and adaptive coping development programs to support young people in the precarious stages of their career development. Nurturing psychological resources and effective coping strategies may address young people's career anxiety and empower them to navigate precarious career landscapes more effectively. As the world of work continues to evolve, fostering the adaptive capacities of young people through psychological and contextual factors will be vital for promoting sustainable career development and decent work outcomes.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/socsci14110668/s1, Table S1. Reliability coefficients and item translations of the Indonesian measures; Table S2. Confirmatory factor analyses of each measure reported per country: Model fit indices; Table S3. Tests for measurement invariance across country groups of respondents; Table S4. Unstandardized regression coefficient, direct and indirect effects

(with Norway as control variable); Table S5. Unstandardized regression coefficient, direct and indirect effects (with Indonesia as control variable); Table S6. Unstandardized regression coefficient, direct and indirect effects (with Bangladesh as control variable); Table S7. Summary of alternative model 1 result; Table S8. Unstandardized regression coefficient, direct and indirect effects alternative model 2.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, A.A.A., N.A.N.R., and R.C.; Data curation, A.A.A. and N.A.N.R.; Formal analysis, A.A.A. and N.A.N.R.; Investigation, A.A.A., N.A.N.R., and R.C.; Methodology, A.A.A. and R.C.; Project administration, A.A.A. and R.C.; Resources, A.A.A. and R.C.; Supervision, A.A.A. and R.C.; Validation, A.A.A. and R.C.; Visualization, A.A.A. and N.A.N.R.; Writing—original draft, N.A.N.R.; Writing—review & editing, A.A.A. and R.C. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Bologna, Italy (Protocol number 0061127, 7 March 2023).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author due to privacy reasons.

Acknowledgments: We would like to thank Katrine Biering Sonnenschein and Saifur Rahman for their contributions to the data collection of our study.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Appendix A

Table A1. Correlations with all control variables.

	Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Career Ambiguity Aversion										
2	Resilience	−0.38 **									
3	Avoidance Coping	0.35 **	−0.16								
4	Approach Coping	0.12	0.05	0.43 **							
5	Career Anxiety	0.56 **	−0.43 **	0.33 **	0.07						
6	Norway	−0.21 **	0.26 **	−0.09	−0.18 *	−0.29 **					
7	Indonesia	0.20 *	−0.06	0.24 **	0.29 **	0.27 **	−0.68 **				
8	Bangladesh	0.01	−0.25 **	−0.18 *	−0.14	0.02	−0.41 **	−0.40 **			
9	Gender	0.09	−0.07	0.14	0.08	0.27 **	−0.13	0.38 **	−0.31 **		
10	Age	−0.18 *	−0.02	0.02	0.23 **	−0.13	−0.40 **	34 **	0.08	0.12	
11	Unemployment Rate	0.19 *	−0.05	0.25 **	0.29 **	0.26 **	−0.64 **	0.99 **	−0.44 **	0.39 **	0.33 **

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

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