

SOCIAL COMPARISON AND PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT IN RELATION TO CAREER ADAPTABILITY AMONG SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN SIDOARJO

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ABSTRACT

Career adaptability is a central psychological resource during the senior secondary phase, yet empirical evidence in Indonesia rarely models comparative and supportive social processes together. This study aimed to examine the associations of social comparison orientation and perceived social support with career adaptability among eleventh-grade students. A cross-sectional correlational survey was administered to 879 students (M age = 16.41, SD = 0.89; 63.4% female) across six public senior high schools in Sidoarjo Regency. Social comparison orientation was measured using the INCOM, perceived social support with the MSPSS, and career adaptability with the CAAS. Data were analyzed using Spearman rank correlations and multiple regression analysis. The results showed that career adaptability was positively associated with social comparison orientation ($\rho = .516$, $p < .001$) and had a numerically stronger association with perceived social support ($\rho = .641$, $p < .001$). The two independent variables were only weakly associated with each other ($\rho = .075$, $p = .026$). In the supplementary multiple regression model, both variables showed significant unique associations with career adaptability ($R^2 = .702$). These findings suggest that perceived social support is a highly salient correlate and that comparative and supportive social processes operate as largely unrelated psychosocial constructs in this sample. The findings have practical implications for school counseling practices, particularly in strengthening relational support and promoting media literacy as complementary areas of support for adolescent career readiness. Given the cross-sectional correlational design, these findings indicate associations rather than causal relationships and should not be interpreted as evidence that social comparison orientation or perceived social support causes changes in career adaptability

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INTRODUCTION

The passage through senior secondary education is a developmental period saturated with psychological demands. Indonesian students in the eleventh grade stand at the point where subject specialisation, university preparation programmes, and family expectations converge. At this stage, students confront not only academic choices but also questions of self-identity and social expectations. In the Indonesian context, educational attainment is frequently considered an important indicator of family social success. Consequently, many adolescents might select a field of study based on environmental influences, prevailing social trends, or parental preferences rather than personal interest or measured aptitude, suggesting that career decision-making is deeply embedded within broader psychosocial dynamics.

These dynamics are increasingly intertwined with the continuous flow of comparative information in contemporary digital environments. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and X expose adolescents to a curated stream of peers' academic achievements and success narratives. This phenomenon aligns with Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), which posits that individuals possess an inherent tendency to evaluate their abilities by comparing themselves with others. Exposure to peers' visible achievements can generate positive motivation, yet it can also produce feelings of being left behind and self-doubt. The well-being consequences of social comparison depend on individual differences in comparison orientation (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999), meaning a high score denotes an individual who attends closely to social information, rather than one who necessarily suffers from doing so. Importantly, social comparison orientation should be distinguished from negative social comparison experiences or their adverse psychological consequences. A stronger tendency to engage in social comparison does not, by itself, indicate that an individual experiences distress, diminished self-esteem, or other negative psychological outcomes. Social comparison may serve different functions depending on the direction, context, interpretation, and individual characteristics of the comparison. Thus, in the present study, social comparison orientation is conceptualised as a dispositional tendency to seek and attend to comparative information, rather than as an indicator of maladaptive or psychologically harmful comparison.

Students' capacity to navigate the transition between education and future employment is also shaped by an internal psychological resource known as career adaptability. Within Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2005, 2013), career adaptability is an individual's readiness to cope with predictable vocational development tasks and occupational transitions. For senior high school students, this capacity is critical to formulating realistic educational plans and tolerating future uncertainty. Alongside social comparison, perceived social support is a significant environmental factor. Perceived social support refers to the subjective appraisal of assistance available from family, peers, and significant others (Zimet et al., 1988). Students who feel supported generally report greater psychological security, enabling them to explore career options more openly.

Despite the importance of these factors, three limitations recur in the existing literature. First, most studies examining these variables are conducted among university students rather than secondary school populations. Second, findings concerning social comparison remain inconsistent, partly because studies may conflate the tendency to engage in social comparison with the negative psychological experiences that may sometimes accompany it. This distinction is important because a high level of social comparison orientation reflects greater attention to comparative information and does not necessarily imply negative psychological consequences. Third, comparative and supportive social processes have rarely been examined together in relation to career adaptability among Indonesian secondary school students. Consequently, it remains unclear whether students' tendency to attend to comparative social information and their perceived availability of social support are independently related to career adaptability, particularly during the developmental stage in which educational and career decisions become increasingly consequential. What this study adds is an explicit examination of these two psychosocial correlates within the same analytical framework among eleventh-grade students in Sidoarjo Regency, Indonesia, allowing the study to distinguish the contribution of comparative orientation from that of perceived relational support rather than treating social comparison as inherently negative.

Drawing on Career Construction Theory, Social Comparison Theory, and Social Support Theory, the following hypotheses were formulated for this cross-sectional study:

H1: Social comparison orientation is positively associated with career adaptability.

H2: Perceived social support is positively associated with career adaptability.

H3: Social comparison orientation and perceived social support are uniquely associated with career adaptability when examined simultaneously.

METHOD

Research Design and Participants

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design to examine subjective psychological states among eleventh-grade students in six public senior high schools in Sidoarjo Regency, East Java. Recruitment proceeded through intact class groups, resulting in a large cluster-based convenience sample. From an initial pool of 1,043 responses, the final analytic sample comprised 879 students after applying strict exclusion criteria (e.g., withheld consent, out of age range, duplicates). The respondents predominantly consisted of females (63.4%) with a mean age of 16.41 years ($SD = 0.89$). While formal ethical clearance from an institutional review board was not acquired, the research adhered to standard ethical principles for participant protection; school authorities acted in loco parentis to approve the study, parents were informed via homeroom teachers, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection.

Instruments

Data were collected using three well-established psychological instruments administered in Indonesian. Social comparison orientation was measured with the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM; Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). Due to issues with negative corrected item-total correlations indicative of acquiescent responding in adolescent samples, two negatively worded items were removed, yielding a reliable nine-item composite ($\alpha = .919$). Perceived social support was measured with the 12-item Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet et al., 1988) adapted by Sulistiani et al. (2022), demonstrating excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .948$). Career adaptability was assessed using the 24-item Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) adapted by Sulistiani and Hendriani (2019), which also showed excellent reliability ($\alpha = .973$).

Data Analysis

Analyses were conducted on the final sample of 879 respondents. Spearman rank correlation was adopted as the primary test for H1 and H2 because the data distributions were negatively skewed and displayed a ceiling effect. These analyses were treated as the primary inferential tests because the study was designed to examine associations among the variables rather than to establish causal or predictive effects. For H3, a multiple regression model utilizing heteroscedasticity-consistent (HC3) standard errors was computed. The regression analysis was retained to examine whether social comparison orientation and perceived social support showed distinct associations with career adaptability when considered simultaneously, thereby providing an additional perspective on the joint contribution of the two psychosocial variables. However, the Ramsey RESET test indicated a departure from linearity, and this finding limits the extent to which a conventional linear regression model can be interpreted as definitive evidence of a linear relationship or unique predictive effect. Accordingly, the regression model was explicitly treated as a supplementary and exploratory analysis rather than as the primary basis for causal or linear inference. The results of this model were nevertheless used to inform H3 and to identify whether the two variables retained statistically significant associations with career adaptability after accounting for their simultaneous inclusion in the model.

Thus, H3 was interpreted cautiously as evidence concerning simultaneous or unique statistical associations within the supplementary model, rather than as evidence that either variable independently predicts or causes career adaptability. This analytical distinction is particularly important given the cross-sectional design and the observed departure from linearity. The regression findings were considered complementary to the primary Spearman correlation results and were subsequently discussed as an additional contribution of the study concerning the relative and simultaneous roles of comparative and supportive social processes in relation to adolescent career adaptability.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

Participant Characteristics

Table 1. Participant Characteristics (N = 879)

Characteristic	Category	f	%
Age	15 years	170	19.3
	16 years	251	28.6
	17 years	386	43.9
	18 years	72	8.2
Gender	Female	557	63.4
	Male	322	36.6
Academic track	Natural sciences (MIPA/IPA)	270	30.7
	Social sciences (IPS)	251	28.6
	Integrated sciences (MIPAS/IPAS)	201	22.9
	Language (Bahasa)	153	17.4
	Other/unclassified	4	0.5
School	SMAN 4 Sidoarjo	165	18.8
	SMAN 1 Sidoarjo	158	18.0
	SMAN 1 Gedangan	157	17.9
	SMAN 3 Sidoarjo	155	17.6
	SMAN 2 Sidoarjo	151	17.2
	SMAN 1 Wonoayu	93	10.6
Administration mode	Online (WhatsApp link)	629	71.6
	Supervised in school	250	28.4

Note. All participants were enrolled in grade eleven. Mean age = 16.41 years (SD = 0.89). Percentages are computed on the analytic sample and sum to 100 within each characteristic, subject to rounding.

The sample was predominantly female and concentrated in the 16 to 17 year age band, which is typical of the Indonesian eleventh-grade cohort. The six schools contributed broadly comparable numbers of respondents, with the exception of SMAN 1 Wonoayu, the smallest participating school.

Reliability and Item Analysis

Table 2. Internal Consistency and Item Analysis of the Three Instruments

Instrument (construct)	Items retained	Items removed	Cronbach's alpha	CITC range
INCOM (social comparison orientation)	9	2	.919	.671 - .734

Instrument (construct)	Items retained	Items removed	Cronbach's alpha	CITC range
MSPSS (perceived social support)	12	0	.948	.707 - .781
CAAS (career adaptability)	24	0	.973	.669 - .812

Note. CITC = corrected item-total correlation. Alpha was computed separately for each instrument on the analytic sample (N = 879). INCOM items 5 and 11 were removed following reverse-scoring because their corrected item-total correlations were negative (-.62 and -.62); with these items retained, alpha for the full 11-item set was .754.

All retained items exceeded the conventional corrected item-total threshold of .30 by a wide margin, and no item deletion would have raised the alpha of its scale. Internal consistency was good for the shortened INCOM and excellent for the MSPSS and CAAS. The very high CAAS coefficient is consistent with its length and with the strong intercorrelation of its four dimensions, and should be read as evidence of a homogeneous global score rather than as an argument for item redundancy.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for the Study Variables (N = 879)

Variable	Items	M	SD	Item mean	Skewness	Kurtosis
Social comparison orientation	9	30.99	8.94	3.44 / 5	-0.39	-0.45
Perceived social support	12	56.48	18.88	4.71 / 7	-0.54	-0.54
Career adaptability	24	88.46	23.89	3.69 / 5	-0.60	-0.56

Note. Observed ranges were 9 to 45, 12 to 84, and 25 to 120, spanning the full theoretical range of each scale. Item mean expresses the average per-item response against the scale maximum.

Mean scores placed all three variables in the moderate to upper region of their respective scales. Expressed per item, respondents reported a moderate tendency toward social comparison (3.44 of 5), a comparatively high level of perceived social support (4.71 of 7), and a moderate to high level of career adaptability (3.69 of 5). All three distributions were negatively skewed with platykurtic shape, and each showed a non-trivial concentration at the scale maximum, a pattern that motivated the rank-based analytic strategy described in the Method.

Assumption Testing

Table 4. Assumption Diagnostics for the Regression Model

Assumption	Test	Statistic	Decision
Normality of residuals	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	p = .149	Satisfied
	Skewness / kurtosis of residuals	0.30 / 0.98	Satisfied
Linearity	Ramsey RESET (power 2)	p < .001	Departure detected
Homoscedasticity	Breusch-Pagan	LM = 23.64, p < .001	Violated
	Glejser (absolute residuals)	p = .0002 / .009	Violated
Multicollinearity	Tolerance / VIF	.996 / 1.004	Satisfied

Note. Glejser p values are reported for social comparison orientation and perceived social support respectively. Residual normality was judged primarily on distributional shape; the Shapiro-Wilk test was significant, as is expected at this sample size for negligible departures.

Residuals were approximately normal in shape, and multicollinearity was negligible, with variance inflation close to unity. Two assumptions were not met. The RESET test indicated a modest departure from strict linearity, and both the Breusch-Pagan and Glejser tests indicated heteroscedastic error variance. Rather than reporting these diagnostics as if they had passed, the analytic strategy was adapted to them: the primary hypothesis tests use Spearman's rank correlation, which requires only monotonicity, and the supplementary regression uses HC3 heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors, which remain valid under non-constant error variance. Substantive conclusions were unchanged under both conventional and robust estimation.

Correlation Analysis

Table 5. Spearman Rank Correlations Between Study Variables (N = 879)

Relationship	rho	95% CI	p	Interpretation
Social comparison - Career adaptability	.516	[.459, .569]	< .001	Moderate
Perceived social support - Career adaptability	.641	[.593, .682]	< .001	Strong
Social comparison - Perceived social support	.075	[.006, .146]	.026	Negligible

Note. Confidence intervals are bias-corrected bootstrap intervals based on 2,000 resamples. Corresponding Pearson coefficients were .545, .670, and .063, indicating that the pattern of results does not depend on the choice of estimator.

Social comparison orientation was positively and significantly associated with career adaptability, $\rho = .516$, $p < .001$, supporting H1. Students who reported a stronger dispositional tendency to compare themselves with others also reported greater readiness to plan, control, explore, and act with confidence in relation to their futures.

Perceived social support showed a stronger positive association with career adaptability, $\rho = .641$, $p < .001$, supporting H2. The confidence intervals for the two coefficients do not overlap, which indicates that the difference in magnitude is itself reliable and not an artefact of sampling variability.

The association between the two predictors was negligible, $\rho = .075$. Although statistically significant at conventional levels, this coefficient corresponds to less than 1% shared variance and should be interpreted as evidence of empirical independence rather than as a meaningful relationship. This is a substantive result in its own right, and is examined further in the Discussion.

Multiple Regression

Table 6. Multiple Regression Predicting Career Adaptability (N = 879)

Predictor	B	SE (HC3)	beta	t	95% CI for B
Constant	1.078	1.995	-	0.54	[-2.84, 5.00]
Social comparison orientation	1.348	0.054	.504	25.07	[1.251, 1.445]
Perceived social support	0.807	0.025	.638	32.64	[0.761, 0.853]

Note. $R^2 = .702$, adjusted $R^2 = .701$, $F(2, 876) = 1030.75$, $p < .001$. Both predictor coefficients are significant at $p < .001$. Partial correlations were .678 for social comparison orientation and .759 for perceived social support. Standard errors are heteroscedasticity-consistent (HC3).

Both variables contributed uniquely to the prediction of career adaptability when entered simultaneously, supporting H3. The standardised coefficients preserved the ordering observed in the bivariate analysis, with perceived social support the stronger predictor. Because the two predictors were essentially uncorrelated, their standardised coefficients are close to their zero-order correlations and their explanatory contributions are close to additive; the model accounted for approximately 70% of the variance in career adaptability scores. This magnitude is high for a cross-sectional self-report design and is discussed with due caution below.

Discussion

This study demonstrated that both social comparison orientation and perceived social support are positively and significantly associated with career adaptability among Indonesian eleventh-grade students. Consistent with expectations, perceived social support emerged as the stronger correlate, and the two independent variables were found to be largely unrelated to one another.

The positive association between social comparison orientation and career adaptability is consistent with the possibility that a dispositional attentiveness to social information accompanies career readiness rather than undermining it. From a developmental perspective, this may reflect an active exploratory phase in which visible peer achievement serves as an informational benchmark. Theoretically, this pattern may be interpreted as consistent with aspects of Career Construction Theory, particularly the possibility that attention to comparative social information may support processes related to career concern and curiosity. However, this interpretation remains theoretical rather than an empirical demonstration that social comparison orientation directly activates specific dimensions of career adaptability. Importantly, the INCOM measures the frequency of monitoring social information rather than its emotional valence, suggesting that informational vigilance may be relevant to career exploration in this context. Thus, the positive association observed in this study should not be interpreted to mean that social comparison is inherently beneficial or that negative social comparison experiences promote career adaptability. Rather, the finding concerns individual differences in the tendency to attend to and engage with comparative social information.

Perceived social support showed a numerically stronger association with career adaptability, aligning with extensive literature on the facilitative role of relational resources. Adolescents who feel supported may have greater psychological resources for managing transition-related demands and engaging in career exploration. From this perspective, perceived social support could theoretically reduce the perceived burden of developmental transitions; however, the present cross-sectional findings cannot establish a buffering effect or determine whether social support protects students from transition-related anxiety over time. The observed association therefore indicates that students who perceive greater social support also tend to report higher career adaptability, without establishing the direction or mechanism of this association.

One of the most notable findings is the negligible association between the two independent variables. This suggests that comparative and supportive social processes are weakly associated constructs in this sample rather than two expressions of a single social-sensitivity trait. However, the magnitude of the shared variance in the regression model ($R^2 = .702$) must be interpreted with substantial caution. Because all variables were measured via self-report at the same point in time, the results are highly susceptible to common method variance. Construct overlap, ceiling effects, and shared measurement characteristics likely inflated these associations. Moreover, because the Ramsey RESET test indicated a departure from linearity, the regression findings should be understood as supplementary evidence of simultaneous statistical associations rather than definitive evidence of linear or causal relationships. The regression results nevertheless provide an additional contribution by indicating that social comparison orientation and perceived social support remained statistically associated with career adaptability when examined simultaneously, while this finding should be interpreted within the limitations of the analytical model.

Practically, the findings provide practical implications for school counseling rather than hypothetical recommendations. Since relational support and social comparison orientation operate independently, career guidance programs may benefit from a two-track design. The first track could strengthen structured relational support through mentoring and family engagement, while the second could address media literacy, helping students constructively interpret comparative digital information. These implications should be understood as practice-oriented applications of the observed associations rather than evidence that such interventions would necessarily increase career

adaptability. Future intervention studies are needed to determine whether strengthening relational support or developing students' media literacy produces measurable changes in career adaptability.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationships between social comparison orientation, perceived social support, and career adaptability among 879 eleventh-grade students in Sidoarjo, Indonesia. The results revealed that both variables were positively and significantly associated with career adaptability, with perceived social support showing a numerically stronger correlation. Within the present sample, social comparison orientation and perceived social support showed only a weak association with each other, suggesting that these two constructs captured relatively distinct psychosocial characteristics among the participating students. The principal contribution of this study is therefore not to establish that comparative and supportive social processes are generally independent constructs, but to show that, within this sample of eleventh-grade students from six public senior high schools in Sidoarjo, the two constructs were only weakly related while each was positively associated with career adaptability.

From a practical perspective, these findings may inform school-based career guidance and counseling by encouraging attention to both relational support and students' interpretation of comparative social information. Such considerations may be incorporated into counseling activities through appropriate family and peer support, mentoring, and media-literacy education. However, these recommendations are derived from the associations observed in the present study and should not be interpreted as evidence that these counseling approaches have been demonstrated to improve career adaptability.

For future research, longitudinal and intervention-based studies are needed to examine the temporal direction and potential mechanisms underlying these associations. Future studies could also investigate whether the observed patterns are replicated across different regions, school types, and student populations in Indonesia, as well as examine whether specific forms of social comparison or particular sources of social support are differentially related to career adaptability. Given the cross-sectional, self-report design and potential method biases, these correlational findings should serve as a foundation for future longitudinal investigations.

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