Unemployment Risk Perception among College-educated Practitioner under Employment Priority Strategy

——Take Tongzhou District as an Example

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Abstract: Employment is crucial for people's livelihoods. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to widespread concerns about unemployment among workers. To study the perception of unemployment risk among university graduates and its influencing factors, this research analyzed 307 survey responses from university-educated individuals in Tongzhou District, Beijing, focusing on personal characteristics and job-related factors. The study found that nearly 80% of university graduates expressed concerns about unemployment. Educational attainment, occupation type, nature of the employing organization, and the most significant risk faced during employment significantly influenced the perception of unemployment risk among university-educated individuals. Finally, this study proposes corresponding strategies and suggestions from government, companies, and individuals, aiming to provide insights and assistance in improving the quality of employment.

Keywords: employment priority strategy, unemployment risk perception, high-quality employment, university degree practitioners

1. Introduction

In the government work report of 2019, for the first time, the employment priority policy was placed at the macro-policy level. The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China explicitly proposed the implementation of an employment priority strategy. This year's government work report pointed out the need to strengthen the orientation of the employment priority policy and consider stable employment as a key indicator of the economy operating within a reasonable range. Employment is the foundation of people's livelihood, and youth employment is of utmost importance in the field of employment. However, according to data from the National Bureau of Statistics, the urban unemployment rate for the population aged 16-24 has been consistently above 15% since 2022. In April and May 2023, it reached 20.4% and 20.8% respectively, indicating a challenging employment situation. As the nation emphasizes the importance of developing science, education, and talent, university graduates are seen as valuable resources for the country and play a crucial role in promoting youth employment. However, these highly educated individuals still face significant employment pressure and increasing difficulty in finding jobs. Concerns about employment and unemployment are widespread among this group.

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Therefore, studying the relationship between university-educated professionals and their perception of the risk of unemployment holds significant research value. As a typical urban district in Beijing, Tongzhou District has also received extensive attention in terms of employment policies and economic development. Therefore, investigating the perceived risk of unemployment among university-educated professionals in Tongzhou District can help deepen our understanding of the impact of the employment-first strategy on this group. It can also provide a scientific basis for government decision-making and the formulation of employment policies. Currently, there is relatively little research on the perceived risk of unemployment among university-educated professionals under the employment-first strategy, particularly in-depth studies focused on specific regions are scarce. Therefore, this research is significant in filling the gaps in existing research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptual Framework

Risk perception is a psychological response to negative or uncertain events, representing a person's cognitive and psychological perception when things, states or visions that are highly valued are threatened [1]. Research on risk perception can be traced back to the 1960s. Sowby found that risk acceptability is not only a question of assessing risk return itself [2]. It is also necessary to take into account people's subjective measures, such as voluntariness. Unemployment risk perception is an important branch of the risk perception theory based on cognitive psychology [3], which is manifested in two aspects: In essence, unemployment risk perception is a subjective experience of uncertainty, belonging to the category of individual cognition; The process of unemployment risk perception is difficult to control and the consequences are serious. The theory derives from the concept of job insecurity, but job insecurity is not directly equivalent to the perceived risk of unemployment.

Lange describes job insecurity as an internal insecurity that individuals face in their careers that can lead to depression and mental illness and have adverse consequences for organizations, with feelings of autonomy and powerlessness being the core features of job insecurity [4]. The perception of unemployment risk emphasizes the perception of unemployment risk generated by the judgment of the objective environment, and emphasizes the influence of external factors. Yuan Bo proposed that the perception of unemployment risk refers to the subjective prediction of the incumbent about the possibility of unemployment in the future [5]. Although this prediction is very subjective and personal, it is obviously based on the working environment and labor market atmosphere. This paper uses Yuan Bo's definition of unemployment risk perception to study.

2.2. Foreign Literature Review

Zheng et al. believe that the study of unemployment risk from the perspective of subjective unemployment risk perception can better explore the problem of unemployment risk from an individual perspective, and through structured in-depth interviews and grounded theoretical analysis, an explanatory framework for migrant workers' unemployment risk perception is constructed [6]. It is found that the unemployment risk perception is composed of psychological, financial, relationship, citizenship and re-immigration. Yonghui L et al. combined with the Chinese context, the perception of unemployment risk is divided into three categories: policy unemployment risk perception, individual differential unemployment risk perception and technical unemployment risk perception [7].

There are many factors affecting the perception of unemployment risk, including both external environment factors and individual factors. Drawing on economic predictions about the future of the digital economy and literature on the sociology of technology and emotion, McClure explores whether certain fears of technology exacerbate concerns about unemployment and financial insecurity

[8]. Finding that new workplace technologies-particularly robotics, artificial intelligence and poorly understood technologies-have an impact on anxiety levels and prospects for employment and financial insecurity. Studies have pointed out that the elderly, women, and people with less education and lower income may be more worried about unemployment caused by autonomous robots and artificial intelligence technology [9]. When faced with unemployment, conscientious people are more likely to find work [10].

The high degree of unemployment risk perception will lead to unemployment fear and a series of social consequences. First of all, at the individual level, it leads to lower income and lower consumption, damages self-confidence, depresses subjective well-being, and negatively affects health [11]. Grafova et al. point out that unemployment risk perception comes from past unemployment experiences, which traumatize the unemployed and ultimately affect their quality of life [12]. Secondly, at the family level, it may complicate family relations, negatively affect marriage and family functions, and directly reduce the psychological well-being of spouses [13]. On the enterprise side, when employees are worried and anxious about the impact of certain organizational factors that threaten their job security, they will hide their knowledge and compete with colleagues to secure their jobs [14], which is detrimental to the long-term development of the organization. Guanglu Xu et al. found that unemployment risk perception is positively correlated with employee knowledge hiding [15]. Finally, the interaction of psychological, social, cultural, and political factors leads to a social amplification of unemployment risk [16], which not only affects people's socioeconomic status, but also deprives people of social and cultural participation.

2.3. Domestic Literature Review

There are two ways to measure unemployment risk: one is from the definition of unemployment to measure unemployment risk. Some scholars use "at the end of the previous year, but there is no work experience for more than one month this year and can not find a new job" to measure the unemployment risk [17], and some scholars use "whether the floating population is unemployed" and "unemployment incidence" to measure the unemployment risk [18], but they do not reflect the uncertain nature of unemployment risk. The second is to measure unemployment risk based on the probability of future unemployment of the labor force. For example, Yuan Bo operationalizes unemployment risk as "How likely do you think you will be unemployed in the next 6 months" [5], although the measurement is subjective, it is reasonable to make a reasonable judgment based on the objective environment you are in. This paper uses the second approach to measure the unemployment risk perception of the employed.

The influencing factors of unemployment risk perception also include external factors and individual factors. External influences include emerging technologies, employment types, and industry classifications. He Qin et al. proposed that the rapid development and application of artificial intelligence technology has brought about many economic and social problems, which has caused people's concern about "machine replacement" and anxiety about technological unemployment [19]. Wang Jun et al. study shows that the type of employment and the type of industry they engage in affect the unemployment risk perception of employees [20]. Yang Shengli et al. used the dynamic monitoring data of floating population in 2014 and 2017 to study the changes of inter-provincial floating population unemployment risk and the contribution rates of its influencing factors, and the results showed that the changes of floating characteristics, personal characteristics and institutional characteristics were the three main determinants of the increase of inter-provincial floating population unemployment risk [21].

Internal influencing factors include human capital, labor contract signing, work experience and so on. Based on the survey data from February to November 2020, Zang Wei quantified the unemployment risk of the floating population in megacities, analyzed the inherent law of

unemployment risk, and found that factors such as high human capital, signing of labor contracts, finance and finance played a significant role in reducing unemployment risk [22]. The study of Yu Changyong et al. shows that health status, education level, work experience and skill training have a significant impact on the unemployment risk of labor force [23]. Fan Changyu et al. analyzed the "enterprise-employee" matching survey data of manufacturing industry in Guangdong Province and found that the shorter the years of education, the more likely workers are to worry about technical unemployment [24]. Workers' worries about technical unemployment follow an N-shaped curve with the current growth in the length of the company.

Studies have shown that a high perception of unemployment risk will damage the physical health of individual employees and lead to emotional exhaustion [25]. At the enterprise level, it will lead to the alienation of employees' behaviors, reflecting the superficial radical behavior and the inner negative behavior [26].

2.4. Research Review

Employment is the most crucial aspect of people's livelihoods and the fundamental support for economic development. However, individuals often experience widespread concerns about unemployment during their careers. This not only has negative effects on individual performance, family harmony, and business development but also on society as a whole. Therefore, it is beneficial for all parties to research and propose strategies to address the perception of unemployment risk. However, a review of the literature reveals that research on risk perception, particularly domestic studies on risk perception, is relatively weak, especially empirical research on the perception of unemployment risk among university-educated professionals. Therefore, this paper aims to empirically analyze the factors influencing the perception of unemployment risk among university-educated professionals, enriching the existing research findings.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

Tongzhou District of Beijing is the urban sub-center of Beijing and the seat of the Beijing Municipal People's Government. The construction of Beijing's urban sub-center is an important part of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei coordinated development strategy personally planned and promoted by General Secretary Xi Jinping, and it is a major plan for the millennium and a national event.

This study explores the perception of unemployment risk among university-educated professionals in Tongzhou District through a combination of interview and questionnaire survey methods.

Firstly, on the morning of September 23, 2022, interviews were conducted with the person in charge and staff members of the Public Employment Service Center of Tongzhou District's Human Resources and Social Security Bureau. The interviews were then transcribed, resulting in a total of 23,134 words. After reviewing the interview content, it was found that there is a widespread concern about unemployment among the employed individuals.

Following this, incorporating on-site research data and literature review findings, the "Employment Status Survey Questionnaire in Tongzhou District" was designed, consisting of a total of 25 questions. The questionnaire aimed to investigate the perception of unemployment risk among university-educated professionals in Tongzhou District and its influencing factors. The variables covered in the questionnaire included demographic characteristics such as gender, age, and educational level, as well as job-related factors such as occupation and nature of employment. The item corresponding to the perception of unemployment risk in the questionnaire was "Do you have concerns about unemployment?" This item was rated on a scale of 1 to 5, ranging from "extremely anxious and concerned" to "extremely confident." The values were assigned to represent the level of

unemployment risk perception, ranging from 1 to 5, with higher values indicating higher levels of perceived risk. This variable was treated as a continuous variable.

3.2. Research Design

This study was conducted from November 24 to December 2, 2022, using a combination of online and offline methods to distribute the questionnaires. A total of 723 questionnaires were targeted for distribution. Out of these, 602 questionnaires were collected, resulting in a response rate of 83.26%. After removing 14 invalid questionnaires, a total of 588 valid questionnaires were obtained, resulting in a questionnaire validity rate of 97.67%.

In the survey, there were 409 respondents with a university education. Among them, 358 respondents completed the questionnaire online, while 51 respondents completed the questionnaire offline. Out of the total respondents, 307 were employed, and 102 were unemployed, accounting for 75.1% and 24.9% respectively. Among the employed individuals, 28.3% had a vocational degree, 65.8% had a bachelor's degree, and 5.9% had a postgraduate degree.

The item corresponding to the perception of unemployment risk in the questionnaire was "Do you have concerns about unemployment?". According to the data analysis results, the highest proportion of employed individuals expressed "some concerns" about unemployment, accounting for 33.55%. Overall, there were 242 employed individuals who had concerns about unemployment, accounting for 78.83% of the total respondents.

3.3. Statistical Analysis

This study focused on 307 university-educated employed individuals using SPSS 26.0. The aim was to understand the basic situation of unemployment risk perception among employed individuals and further analyze the influencing factors of unemployment risk perception from two aspects: demographic characteristics and job-related factors. The data were analyzed using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and independent samples t-test.

4. Research Findings

4.1. Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis of the sample data yielded the following findings.

The study found that nearly 80% of university-educated professionals had concerns about unemployment, indicating a high level of perceived unemployment risk. As shown in Figure 1, the highest proportion among employed individuals expressed "some concerns" about unemployment, accounting for 33.55%. The proportion of those expressing "very anxious concerns" was 24.43%, while only 9.12% expressed "very confident" about not facing unemployment. Overall, a total of 242 individuals, accounting for 78.83%, expressed concerns about unemployment among the employed population. The survey results on the "greatest risk faced during employment" revealed that the highest proportion, 52.44%, identified unemployment (income) as the most significant risk, further indicating the high perception of unemployment risk among employed individuals.

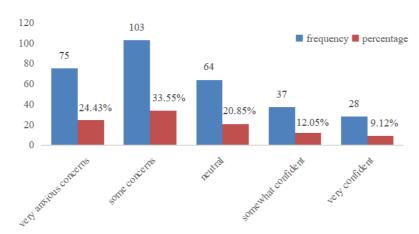


Figure 1: Perceived unemployment risk among university-educated professionals.

University-educated professionals below the age of 20 and those aged 31-50 have a higher perception of unemployment risk. The lower the level of education, the higher the perception of unemployment risk. University-educated professionals with a registered residence in provinces other than Beijing have a higher perception of unemployment risk compared to those with a registered residence in Beijing. Employed individuals who have signed labor contracts have a higher perception of unemployment risk than those who have not. Female professionals have a higher perception of unemployment risk than male professionals.

The most important factor considered by university-educated professionals when choosing employment is salary, accounting for 36.8%. The next significant factor is job stability, accounting for 22.1%. Career development, as well as benefits and social security, account for 11.7% and 10.4%, respectively.

When unemployed or facing unemployment, 89.2% of university-educated individuals express a willingness to find employment again, indicating that the majority of unemployed individuals with a university education are willing to rejoin the workforce. However, among unemployed individuals with a willingness to work, 47.25% state that they have "attempted to find work but were unsuccessful," and 52% report facing difficulties during the job search process, indicating challenges in finding employment. The most needed employment service is "job recommendations," accounting for 80.2%, followed by employment training and guidance, with proportions of 53.8% and 51.6%, respectively. Reemployment preferences lean towards "full-time employment" and "flexible employment," accounting for 47.3% and 37.4%, respectively. Entrepreneurship is less favored, with only 14.3% expressing an interest in self-employment.

All university-educated employed individuals and unemployed individuals have utilized public employment services. Among them, the highest proportion is for "vocational skills training, entrepreneurship training, and skill assessment services," accounting for 50.0%. The next significant service is "career guidance and job referral services," accounting for 42.7%. "Personnel file management services" follow at a proportion of 41.2%. The evaluation of the public employment services provided by the Tongzhou District Human Resources and Social Security Bureau shows that 50.4% rated it as "excellent".

4.2. Research on Influencing Factors of Unemployment Risk Perception

This article aims to investigate the factors influencing the perception of unemployment risk among university-educated professionals from two perspectives: demographic factors and job-related characteristics. The study will employ one-way analysis of variance and independent-sample t-tests to analyze the data.

4.2.1. The Influence of Demographic Factors on Unemployment Risk Perception

Demographic factors include gender, age, educational level, household registration status, and residency and employment situation.

Through the analysis of differences, it was found that among the demographic factors, only educational level has a significant impact on the perception of unemployment risk among employed individuals (Table 1).

	Education level	N	Mean	F	Sig.	Significance of Differences
Unemployment risk perception	Postgraduate	18	3.39			
	Undergraduate	202	2.43	5.333	0.005	yes
	College Diploma	87	2.40			

Table 1: Difference analysis between education level and unemployment risk perception.

It can be seen that there are significant differences in the perception of unemployment risk among individuals with different educational levels (p=0.005<0.05), indicating significant differences in the perception of unemployment risk among employed individuals with different educational backgrounds.

The lower the educational level, the higher the perception of unemployment risk. Individuals with a college degree have a higher perception of unemployment risk compared to those with a bachelor's degree, and individuals with a bachelor's degree have a higher perception of unemployment risk compared to those with a graduate degree. One of the reasons for this difference is the compensating effect of human capital investment for individuals with higher educational qualifications.

4.2.2. The Influence of Job Characteristics on Unemployment Risk Perception

Job characteristics include occupational category, work-related risks, nature of ownership of the organization, and type of employment contract.

Through one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and independent samples t-test, it was found that among the job characteristic factors, occupational category, nature of ownership of the organization, and the maximum work-related risk significantly influence the perception of unemployment risk among individuals with a college education (From Table 2 to Table 4).

Table 2: Difference analysis between occupation type and unemployment risk perception.

	Occupation type	Mean	F	Sig.	Significance of Differences
Unemployment risk perception	Heads of state organs, party and mass organizations, enterprises and public institutions Professional technical personnel Clerical and related personnel Business, service personnel Production personnel in agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, fishingand water	2.85 2.91 2.36 2.28 2.83	3.782	0.001	yes
	resources				

Table 2: (continued).

Production, transportation	
equipment operators and related	3.25
personnel	
military personnel	1.00
Other practitioners	2.09

As can be seen from Table 2, the unemployment risk perception of university educated employees in different occupational categories (p=0.001<0.05), indicating that there are significant differences in the perception of unemployment risk among employees of different occupational categories.

Military personnel (1 score) have the highest degree of worry about unemployment. Through the analysis of their questionnaire information, it is found that they are all flexible employment personnel, and the risk of losing income (unemployment) in work, the risk of old-age support, the instability of work, especially "difficult to find a job and getting older" are the main reasons leading to their high degree of worry about unemployment.

Among all occupational categories, the perceived unemployment risk of professional and technical personnel is low, which may be related to the number of professional and technical personnel recruitment demand is greater than the number of job seekers. In the "Top 100 occupations in the second quarter of 2021 that are more than the" most needed jobs "in the country," released by the Department of Employment on July 8, 2021, 17 occupations belong to professional and technical personnel.

As can be seen from Table 3, employees with different ownership characteristics of employment units have a significant impact on unemployment risk perception (p=0<0.05), indicating that there are significant differences in the perception of unemployment risk among university educated employees with different unit owner-ship characteristics (Table 3).

Compared to enterprises of other ownership types, rural individual businesses (1.88 score) exhibit the highest level of worry regarding unemployment. The agricultural sector has lower requirements for practitioners, and there is a strong substitutability in work, which contributes to the heightened concerns about unemployment among rural individuals. Employees of local state-owned sole proprietor ships (2.54 score) express higher levels of concern about unemployment compared to employees of central and provincial state-owned sole proprietor ships (3.47 score). One possible explanation is that the welfare benefits and employee protections in central and provincial state-owned sole proprietor ships.

Table 3: Difference analysis between nature of unit ownership and unemployment risk perception.

	Nature of unit ownership	Mean	F	Sig.	Significance of Differences
Unemployment risk perception	(central, provincial) wholly state-owned	3.47			
	(local) wholly state-owned	2.54			
	Urban collective ownership	2.70			
	Urban private sector (including partnerships)	2.15	5.585 0	0	yes
	Urban individual (enterprise)	2.06			
	Sino-foreign joint venture	3.19			
	Foreign-funded enterprise	2.63			
	State holding enterprise	2.88			

Table 3: (continued).

Other joint-stock enterprises (including joint-stock ownership enterprises)	1.96
Rural private enterprise	3.75
Rural individual	1.88
other	2.22

Table 4: Difference analysis between the greatest risks faced in work and unemployment risk perception.

	The greatest risks faced in work	Mean	F	Sig.	Significance of Differences
Unemployment risk perception	Unemployment (income) risk Pension risk	1.93 2.78	25.279		yes
	Medical risk	2.87		0	
	Industrial injury risk	3.45			
	other	3.57			

As can be seen from Table 4, the maximum risk faced by employees and the perception of unemployment risk (p=0<0.05) There is a significant difference, indicating that there is a significant difference between the maximum risk faced in the work process and the perception of unemployment risk of university-educated practitioners.

The perceived impact of unemployment risk among university graduates on their employment prospects varies from high to low, with unemployment risk (income risk) (1.93 score), retirement risk (2.78 score), healthcare risk (2.87 score), and occupational injury risk (3.45 score). In other words, the primary reason for employed individuals' concerns about unemployment is the fear of losing their source of income and the threat to their livelihood.

4.3. Suggestions

Through the analysis and discussion above, this article provides recommendations for policymakers, employers, and individuals to address concerns about unemployment and improve job security, thereby enhancing the relevance and applicability of the research.

Government level: Strengthen public employment services for specific groups of people. Pay special attention to the employment situation of those under 20 years old and those aged 31-50 years old with university degrees, college degrees, university degrees registered in other provinces and cities, female university degrees, military personnel, and rural individuals, further improve the strength of employment recommendation, employment training and employment guidance, and help people with a high perception of unemployment risk to ease their worries about unemployment, Once faced with unemployment can quickly find a suitable job. At the same time, we will vigorously develop vocational and technical education to train more professional and technical personnel.

Enterprise level: according to its own business conditions, raise the salary level of employees within a reasonable range, provide commercial insurance for employees, enhance their ability to resist risks, and strengthen the job security of female employees to improve their job stability.

Individual level: In the context of mass entrepreneurship and innovation, the government supports entrepreneurship, and increasing self-employment is also a few employment methods. At the same

time, we can enhance the competitiveness of the labor market and reduce the perception of unemployment risk by further improving education and increasing the stock of human capital.

5. Conclusion

The research findings indicate that the factors influencing the perceived unemployment risk among university graduates include education level, occupation type, nature of the employing unit, and the greatest risks faced during employment. Regarding education level, a lower level of education is associated with a higher perception of unemployment risk. In terms of occupation type, military personnel exhibit the highest level of concern regarding unemployment, while professional and technical personnel have a lower perception of unemployment risk. Concerning the nature of the employing unit, rural individual workers express the highest level of unemployment concerns, and employees of local state-owned sole proprietorships exhibit higher levels of unemployment concerns compared to those working for central or provincial state-owned sole proprietorships. In terms of the greatest risks faced in employment, the impact of unemployment risk (income risk) on the concern for unemployment is the highest, followed by retirement risk. Finally, corresponding strategies and recommendations are proposed at the government, corporate, and individual levels.

This study mainly focuses on university graduates employed in Tongzhou District, Beijing. It may suffer from sample bias, and therefore the research findings may not be fully generalizable to other regions. Future research could expand the scope and explore the perception of unemployment risk among individuals from different backgrounds to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing job security. Additionally, investigating the effectiveness of specific interventions or policies in reducing the perception of unemployment risk, studying long-term trends in job security perception, or exploring the role of technology and automation in shaping perceptions of job stability could be valuable avenues of research. Furthermore, future studies could consider employing mixed methods, integrating qualitative approaches such as interviews or focus groups, to delve deeper into individuals' subjective experiences and perspectives on the perception of unemployment risk, understanding the experiential, emotional, and underlying factors that influence the perception of unemployment risk among university graduates.

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