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ARTICLE

The Impact of Perceived Parental Expectations on Career Adaptability: The Moderating Role of Parental Career Support

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ABSTRACT

Background: Career adaptability is regarded as the core index to measure the adequacy of youth's "career readiness", which refers to the psychological resources of individuals to cope with current or expected career tasks, career changes or career difficulties. Methods: In this study, 529 students (246 male students, 46.5%, 283 female students, 53.5%) in the first grade of a senior high school in Beijing were assessed by the perceived Parental Expectation Scale, the Parental Career Support Scale and the Career Adaptability Scale. Results: (1) Parents' expectations, parents' career support and career adaptability were significantly positively correlated, and the scores were all higher than the average. (2) Parents' expectations and parents' careers are significantly positive predictors of career adaptability; (3) The variable of parental career support plays a moderating role in the path of perceived parental expectations on career adaptability. Conclusions: In the middle school stage, parents' provision of career resources has a good promotion effect on students' career preparation and coping with career difficulties.

Keywords: Middle school career; Perceived Parental Expectation; Parents' career support; Career adaptability

1. Introduction

The career counseling movement launched in the United States in the early 20th century led to the emergence of the career development theory, which was first proposed by Parsons to answer how to achieve the best match between individuals and careers at that time. Super, Holland, Savickas and other scholars continued to enrich career theories in the future and deepen the understanding of career devel-

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opment [1].

Under the background of the "double reduction" policy, it is necessary to realize the necessity of youth career development. Career education in primary and secondary schools emphasizes students' physical and mental health, the connection between the present and the future, the cultivation of career consciousness, etc., in order to enable students to have better initiative and adaptability in future career decision-making ^[2]. In the period of adolescent development, the family is an important environment for children's growth and a key variable in the transition from school to society during individual career development ^[3].

Perception of parental expectations (PPE) is a concept based on parental expectations, which refers to the child's perceived support from parents. Jin Lu, through her research on perceived parental expectations, believes that only perceived expectations can have an impact on individuals [4]. Liu Yuan believes that parents' different attitudes towards careers will affect children's career decisions [5], and especially the existence of career stereotypes will easily lead to difficulties in children's career decisions [6]. A review of previous studies shows that the research on perception of parents' expectations mainly involves learning education, social adjustment and mental health in middle school groups, while the research on career development education is less.

Parental career support (PCS) extends from career support and mainly includes material support, emotional support, information support and suggestion support [7]. The main sources of career support for teenagers are parents and teachers. Leung et al.'s research shows that family positively promotes children's career decision-making in terms of tools and relationship support [8]. According to Dietrich, parents' career support is mainly embodied in actively guiding children to find their own interests and advantages, assisting them in reflection and summary, and indirectly improving their career cognition [9]. Deng Linyuan found that family support has a positive predictive effect on high school student's career adaptability [10]. At present, most of the scales on

parental career support in China are based on the parental career support scale written by Dietrich et al., covering college students ^[9].

The concept of career adaptability (CA) comes from the career development theory proposed by American career planning expert Super, which is based on the career construction theory [11]. Career construction theory believes that a career is constructed, and different career stages have different tasks, but adaptation is its core element. At present, the 4C model of career adaptability is the main model. It includes four aspects: career concern, career control, career curiosity and career confidence. Germeijs et al. found that there is a positive correlation between young people's career adaptability and their planning, exploration, self-confidence and decision-making quality in the process of career transition [12]. On the other hand, career adaptability is also influenced by family factors. For example, Wu Shuwan, a scholar from Taiwan, found in a sample of Taiwan college students that students with high socioeconomic status had higher career adaptability than those with low socioeconomic status [11]. Hirschi's study confirmed that family support positively predicted adolescents' career adaptability [13]. Therefore, career adaptability is related to individual and family levels. Based on this, this study proposes hypothesis 1: Middle school students' perception of parents' expectations, parents' career support and career adaptability are significantly correlated.

According to the literature review, the coverage of Chinese career research is still limited, especially in primary and secondary schools. In China, parents' expectations often have an important impact on children's studies and physical and mental health. Previous studies usually focus on the construction of a career system, and rarely discuss the relationship between family resources and middle school students' career development. Liu Junping found that parents' expectations and parents' career support effectively promoted adolescents' career adaptability [14]. Based on this, this study proposed hypothesis 2: Middle school students' perception of parents' expectations and parents' career support significantly predicted

career adaptability. However, it is still controversial whether the higher the parental career support, the better ^[9], which may be due to the adverse impact of excessive or too little involvement on the career development of adolescents. Therefore, it is also necessary to explore the role of parents' career support in the development of teenagers' careers. Based on this, this study proposes hypothesis 3: Middle school students' parents' career support plays a moderating role in the perceived parents' expectations on the path of career adaptation.

Additionally, situated in the vibrant educational landscape of Beijing, this study employs a questionnaire method to meticulously analyze the career development of first-year high school students. The strategic timing of the study, conducted before students make critical subject choices, aligns with this pivotal decision-making phase in their academic journey. By focusing on the impact of perceived parental expectations and parental career support, the findings aim not only to contribute to the theoretical framework but also to provide practical insights and data support for frontline career educators. These insights will assist in navigating career courses and enhancing the adaptability of students in this critical phase of their academic and career journey.

2. Materials and methods

2.1 Research object

A total of 550 students in Grade One of two middle schools in Beijing were selected by issuing paper questionnaires offline. According to the failure to answer the lie detector questions correctly (2 questions in total, and 1 question if not answered correctly), too many choices of the same option (such as "1") and incomplete situations, 21 questionnaires that did not meet the requirements were eliminated, and 529 valid questionnaires were finally recovered, with a recovery rate of 96.18%. Among them, 246 (46.5%) were male and 283 (53.5%) were female. There were 429 (81.1%) only children (OC) and 100 (18.9%) non-only children (NOC).

2.2 Informed consent

Before issuing questionnaires, the research had contacted psychology teachers and parents of students in two middle schools in Beijing, and was allowed to issue paper versions of questionnaires to students in grade one. During the test, each class will have an instructor to read the notes for filling in the questionnaire. This study gives each class a certain amount of support expenses for the purchase of stationery, small gifts, etc. All participants agreed to participate in the test and were normal students receiving compulsory education.

2.3 Test Tool

In this study, two middle schools in Beijing have distributed the Perceived Parental Expectation Scale (middle school version), the Parents' Career Support Scale (middle school version) and the Career Adaptability Scale. Students answered the questions by themselves, and after the answers were completed, the teachers collected them and mailed them to the researchers for data analysis.

Perceived Parental Expectations Scale (PPE, Middle School Version)

Perceiving Parents' Expectations (middle school version) was compiled by Cheng Lin and revised by Jin Lu. The questionnaire consists of 24 questions, including academic performance (e.g., "My parents are very concerned about my academic performance"), future achievements (e.g., "My parents expect me to be very successful in the future"), moral performance (e.g., "My parents expect me to be an upright person"), interpersonal relationships (e.g., "My parents don't expect me to have many good friends"), and physical and mental qualities (e.g., "My parents don't expect me to have many good friends"). "Parents expect me to develop a good habit of loving sports") five dimensions, using five points, with the total score indicating the degree of perception of parents' expectations, the higher the total score, the higher the degree of perception of parents' expectations. In this study, the internal consistency coefficient of the scale is 0.816.

Parental Career Support Scale (PCS, Middle School Version)

The Parental Career-Related Behavior Scale compiled by Dietrich and Kracke and the Parental Career Support Subscale in the Chinese version of the scale revised by Guan et al. was used as a measurement tool for parental career support for high school students, with a total of 5 questions (e.g., "My parents will advise me on my career choices"), using a five-point scale, from 1 to 5, corresponding to the frequency of my parents' career support level (very inconsistent with choice 1; very consistent with choice 5), calculated by the total score, the higher the total score indicates the higher the degree of parental career support. In this test, Cronbach's a coefficient is 0.908.

Career Adaptability Scale (CA)

The Chinese version of the Career Adapting-Ability Scale (CAAS) revised by Hou Zhijin et al. was adopted ^[15]. The questionnaire structure and dimension were consistent with the Career Adapting-Ability Scale, which consisted of 24 questions. There are career concerns (e.g., "Caring about my life plan"), career curiosity (e.g., "Thinking about my future"), career control (e.g., "Making decisions on my own"), and career confidence (e.g., "Making decisions on my own"). "Overcome difficulties" has four dimensions, and each dimension corresponds to 6 questions. The scale uses five points, 1–5 respectively means "very inconsistent" to "very consistent", calculated by the total score, the higher the total score, indicating the stronger the career adaptability. In this

test, Cronbach's a coefficient is 0.972.

2.4 Statistical methods

SPSS 19.0 is used to conduct descriptive statistics, independent sample *t*-test, correlation analysis matrix, regression analysis and moderating effect analysis on the valid questionnaires.

3. Results

3.1 Common method bias test

To eliminate common method bias caused by common method variation, this article will use Harman's single factor test method to conduct exploratory factor analysis on a total of 53 items of three variables, namely perceived parental expectations, parental career support and career adaptability based on Podsakoff's research results. The results show that there are 17 factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 without rotation, and the first factor explained 33.151% of the variation (less than 40%), indicating that there is no common method bias in this study.

3.2 Descriptive statistics, *t*-test and correlation analysis

The mean value, standard deviation and independent sample *t*-test of perceived parental expectations, parental career support and career adaptability are shown in **Table 1** below, and the correlation analysis of variables in each dimension is shown in **Table 2**.

NOC Male **Female** \mathbf{OC} Total 3 1 2 (N = 246)(N = 283)(N = 429)(N = 100)(N = 529)100.48 98.69 99.91 97.84 99.48 1 PPE 1.59 1 1.64 (12.70)(10.76)(11.69)(11.76)(11.69)20.70 20.94 20.70 20.67 20.83 0.58**2 PCS 0.46 -0.68(3.92)(3.932)(3.927)(3.93)(4.31)95.48 93.73 95.48 95.05 94.52 0.41** 0.39**3 CA 1.29 -0.35(16.34)(14.79)(16.34)(15.91)(15.54)

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, *t*-test and correlation analysis *M* (*SD*).

Note: p < 0.05, p < 0.01, p < 0.00.

Table 2. Correlation as	alysis of variables i	in each dimension	(N = 529).
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	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Concern	1									
2 Curiosity	0.78**	1								
3 Control	0.66**	0.68**	1							
4 Confidence	0.73**	0.73**	0.79**	1						
5 Academic	0.18**	0.18**	0.26**	0.25**	1					
6 Moral	0.29**	0.26**	0.31**	0.29**	0.36**	1				
7 Relationship	0.12**	0.15**	0.17**	0.14**	0.06	0.32**	1			
8 Physical	0.33**	0.32**	0.39**	0.37**	0.33**	0.52**	0.30**	1		
9 Achievement	0.15**	0.22**	0.22**	0.29**	0.59**	0.19**	-0.09^{**}	0.17**	1	
10 Support	0.37**	0.34**	0.33**	0.37**	0.28**	0.43**	0.23**	0.68**	0.26**	1

The results in Table 1 show that there is a significant positive correlation between perceived parental expectations and parental career support (r = 0.58), between perceived parental expectations and career adaptability (r = 0.41), and between parental career support and career adaptability (r = 0.39). The scores were all good and above the average level, which supports hypothesis 1. Independent sample t-test results showed that gender had no significant differences in perceived parental expectations (t = 1.64, p = 0.10), parental career support (t = -0.68, p = 0.49) and career adaptability scores (t = 1.29, p = 0.19). There were no significant differences in perceived parental expectation (t = 1.59, p = 0.11), parental career support (t = 0.46, p = 0.64) and career adaptability (t = -0.35, p = 0.72).

The results of Table 2 show that, except for the

significant negative correlation between the dimension of "future achievement" and the dimension of "interpersonal relationship" (r = -0.09, p < 0.01), and no significant correlation between "interpersonal relationship" and "academic performance" (r = 0.06, p > 0.05), the other dimensions are significantly positively correlated (p < 0.01).

3.3 Regression analysis

Using stepwise regression analysis, gender and only child as control variables, model 1 is established. Adding perceived parental expectation (PPE) and parental career support (PCS) as predictive variables, model 2 is established. The interaction item between PPE and PCS is added as a predictor, model 3 is established, and the regression analysis model is constructed, as shown in **Table 3**.

Table 3. The regression model.

	Model	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	β	t	p	β	t	p	β	t	p	
Gender	-1.74	-1.28	0.19	-1.35	-1.11	0.26	-1.10	-0.91	0.35	
One-child situation	0.58	0.33	0.73	1.51	0.97	0.32	1.37	0.89	0.37	
PEE				0.35	5.59***	0.00	0.37	5.82***	0.00	
PCS				0.95	5.03***	0.00	1.09	5.65***	0.00	
PEE×PCS							0.04	3.23***	0.00	
R^2	0.00			0.21			0.22			
F	0.89			35.12			30.70			
p	0.41			0.00			0.00			
ΔR^2	0.00			0.20			0.22			
ΔF	0.89			35.12			10.48			
Δp	0.41			0.00			0.00			

The results of regression analysis showed that perceived parental expectation, parental career support and interaction terms were significant predictors of career adaptation (p < 0.001). Hypothesis 2 is supported. Gender is significant in predicting career confidence ($\beta = -0.86$, t = -2.20, p < 0.05), but not significant in predicting other dimensions of career adaptability (p > 0.05).

3.4 Analysis of the moderating effect

Model 1 in PROCESS 3.0 plug-in of SPSS 19.0 compiled by Hayes was used to test the adjustment effect [16]. First, gender (C1) and only child (C2) were taken as control variables, then career adaptability was taken as the dependent variable (Y), and each dimension of perceived parental expectation was taken as the independent variable (X), to investigate the moderating effect of parental career support (M) on perceived parental expectation (X) and career adaptability (Y). The adjustment model is shown in **Table 4** and **Figure 1**.

Table 4. The moderating model (N = 529).

	В	SE B	t	p	Lower 95%	
Constant	93.45	0.68	135.70***	0.00	92.09	94.80
X	0.37	0.63	5.90***	0.00	0.24	0.49
M	1.08	0.19	5.60***	0.00	0.70	1.45
$\boldsymbol{X}\times\boldsymbol{M}$	0.04	0.01	3.20***	0.00	0.15	0.65

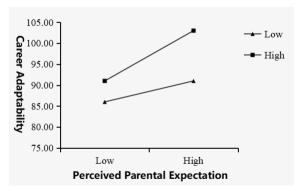


Figure 1. The moderating effect.

The moderating effect results showed that parental career support and perceived parental expectation interaction terms were significant ($\beta = 0.04$, p < 0.001, CI [0.15, 0.65]), and parental career support

is established as a moderating variable, supporting hypothesis 3.

4. Discussion

This study is based on the career development of senior students in two middle schools in Beijing, and it is found that the overall career development level of middle school students is relatively good, but there is still room for development. By exploring the relationship between middle school students' perception of parents' expectations, parents' career support and career adaptability, it is found that the former two have a positive predictive effect on career adaptability, and support the moderating effect of parents' career support in the path. The results are consistent with Deng Linyuan [10], but the results on the impact of gender on career adaptability are still inconsistent with previous studies.

In China, "looking forward to the son, looking forward to the woman" has always been the wish of parents for their children. Generally speaking, Chinese families play the role of "supporters" for their children's academic growth, especially in high school [17]. This is because high school academic performance is closely related to China's college entrance examination, and the score of the college entrance examination largely determines the choice of college major and the level of future career achievement. According to Maccoby and Martin's parenting style theory, parenting can be divided into authority, dictatorship, neglect and tolerance [9]. The parents' high level of career expectations and corresponding career support behaviors are similar to authoritative parenting, which is characterized by high control and acceptance. The results of this study showed that authoritative parenting, which refers to high perceived parental expectations and career support behaviors, can positively promote children's career development, especially in terms of career adjustment. High perceived parental expectation indicates that parental supervision of children promotes self-restraint, while high parental career support can obtain positive feedback from parents on career exploration, career decision-making and other events, which in turn promotes career adaptation.

This study did not find a difference between gender and only child in the total score of the variable, but found a significant gender difference in the dimension of career confidence. The relationship between gender and career adaptability has always been concerned [18], but no consistent research conclusion has been reached. Because of the physiological structure, cognitive concept and role expectation, career decision often has gender differences [19]. In China, men are more likely to be expected to be scientists or politicians, while women are more likely to be expected to be teachers or doctors. Some studies believe that gender has no significant impact on career development [13]. In Taiwan, scholar Wu Shuwan found in a career study of Taiwan college students that male college students in Taiwan scored significantly higher on career adaptability than female students, indicating that career studies often have differences between Chinese and Western and cross-cultural backgrounds [11]. In this study, although no gender difference in career adaptability was found, it was found that men scored significantly higher than women in the dimension of career confidence, and the research results were consistent with Lin Yuyi, who believed that men were more optimistic about the future [20]. In short, this study did not find the effect of gender on middle school students' career adaptability, but found that boys had a significant advantage in career confidence.

Through the correlation analysis of each dimension of the variables, it is found that except for the significant negative correlation between "interpersonal relationship" and "future achievement", and no significant correlation between "academic performance", the other variables show a significant positive correlation, reflecting the correlation between family and career. Lin Yuyi believes that in high school, individuals are more guided by their parents, and teenagers tend to respect their parents' opinions [20]. Due to the particularity of the sampling area in this study, the academic pressure in high school is great, and students' pursuit of "achievement" or "study" and "interpersonal" often "can not have both fish and

bear's paw". In other words, if individuals pay more attention to academic achievement, interpersonal relationships are correspondingly neglected. This is a new finding in this study, but it also conforms to the law of middle school students' psychology and behavior under the background of Chinese education.

This study also found the moderating effect of parental career support. The biggest difference between parents' career support and perceived parents' expectations is that parents' career support is a more practical action, while perceived parents' expectations pay more attention to their own awareness, the former is more explicit and the latter is more implicit. According to the study of Lin Yuyi, middle school students have a relatively good sense of self-mastery in career development, but there is still much room for improvement in career planning and execution [20]. Parental career support symbolizes the degree of parent-child career interaction [21,22]. Active and effective career support is conducive to the construction of family career action work mode, the promotion of youth's career exploration and sense of security, and the further enhancement of the prediction of career adaptability.

5. Insufficient and prospect

Some limitations of this study are as follows: First, sampling restrictions. This study only took samples from two middle schools in one district and only involved one grade. In terms of validity, the ecological validity and external validity of this study need to be improved. Second, limitations of research methods. This study adopted a self-evaluation method and lacked data feedback from parents.

Future research prospects: The first is to enrich sampling. The sample group can be enriched from cross-regional, cross-cultural backgrounds, and cross-grade perspectives to improve ecological validity. The second is the diversification of research methods. Longitudinal research can be combined to dynamically examine the impact of grades on middle school students' career adaptability, and qualitative research can be used to conduct in-depth interviews on family situations to obtain objective and factual

career interaction data and improve research reliability. The third is to deepen the theoretical discussion. Further explore the positive effects of middle school students' career resources such as teacher support, peer encouragement, and Internet use on their career development. The fourth is practical research. With the help of theoretical research, promote the development and design of middle school career courses, systematically assist middle school students in cultivating a good career awareness, and improve their ability to actively adapt to the career environment to plan major selection and employment direction as early as possible.

6. Conclusions

This study explores the relationship between perceived parental expectations, parental career support, and career adaptability among middle school students, and draws the following conclusions:

- (1) Perceived parental expectations and parental career support have a significant positive predictive effect on career adaptability;
- (2) Parental career support plays a moderating role in the relationship between perceived parental expectations and career adaptability.

Author Contributions

Changfeng Chen: Responsible for literature review, data collection, data analysis and thesis writing.

Zeren Liang: Responsible for data collection, data analysis.

Shixiang Liu: Responsible for overall design and thesis writing.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Dear students,

Hello! You are invited to participate in a small survey of junior high school students. This survey is anonymous, and all options are not good or wrong, please answer according to the actual situation, the survey results are for research purposes only, and all answers will be strictly confidential, please do not have any concerns, carefully answer the following questions. If you have any questions during the answering process, please ask the interviewer in time, thank you for your cooperation!

First please fill in the personal information: (tick " $\sqrt{}$ " in the corresponding option)

Gender: ① male ② female Only child: ① Yes ② No

Questionnaire 1: Perceived parental Expectation questionnaire

Please mark " $\sqrt{}$ " in the corresponding position according to the degree of conformity between the described content and your actual situation, thank you!

	Totally Disagree	Partially Disagree		Partially Agree	Totally Agree
A1.My parents are concerned about my academic performance.	1	2	3	4	5
A2.My parents expect me to be near the top of my class in the exam.	1	2	3	4	5
A3.My parents expect me to get better grades.	1	2	3	4	5
A4.My parents expect me to have at least a college degree in the future.	1	2	3	4	5
A5.My parents expect me to be very successful in the future.	1	2	3	4	5
A6.My parents expect me to have a high social status in the future.	1	2	3	4	5
A7.My parents expect me to earn a lot of money in the future.	1	2	3	4	5
A8.My parents expect me to be an expert in some field in the future.	1	2	3	4	5
A9.My parents expect me to respect the old and love the young in my life.	1	2	3	4	5
A10.My parents expect me to be an upright person.	1	2	3	4	5
A11.My parents think it's important that I have a passion for helping others.	1	2	3	4	5
A12.My parents don't expect me to have many good friends.	1	2	3	4	5
A13.My parents didn't care if I was popular at school.	1	2	3	4	5
A14.My parents didn't care if I was willing to make friends with others.	1	2	3	4	5
A15.My parents did not encourage me to care for and help my classmates.	1	2	3	4	5
A16.My parents didn't care whether I could get along well with my classmates at school.	1	2	3	4	5
A17.My parents didn't care if I had positive interactions with my teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
A18.My parents are concerned about my health problems such as colds and illnesses.	1	2	3	4	5
A19.My parents encourage me to form the good habit of loving sports.	1	2	3	4	5
A20.My parents want me to have a regular life.	1	2	3	4	5
A21.My parents think it is very important for me to form good eating habits.	1	2	3	4	5
A22.My parents think it important that I have regular health check-ups.	1	2	3	4	5
A23.My parents want me to have a proper way to relieve stress.	1	2	3	4	5
A24.My parents want me to develop morally, intellectually and physically.	1	2	3	4	5

Questionnaire 2: Parental Career Support questionnaire

Please mark " $\sqrt{}$ " in the corresponding position according to the degree of conformity between the described content and your actual situation, thank you!

	Totally Disagree	Partially Disagree	General Agree	Partially Agree	Totally Agree
B1.My parents will discuss my career interests and abilities with me.	1	2	3	4	5
B2.My parents encouraged me to find information about careers I was interested in.	1	2	3	4	5
B3.My parents encouraged me to take part in social practice.	1	2	3	4	5
B4.My parents will give me advice on my career choice.	1	2	3	4	5
B5.My parents would discuss different career opportunities with me.	1	2	3	4	5

Questionnaire 3: Career Adaptability questionnaire

Please mark " $\sqrt{}$ " in the corresponding position according to the degree of conformity between the described content and your actual situation, thank you!

	Totally Disagree	Partially Disagree	General Agree	Partially Agree	Totally Agree
C1.Thinking about what my future holds.	1	2	3	4	5
C2.Recognizing that the choices I make today are tied to my future.	1	2	3	4	5
C3.Plan for the future.	1	2	3	4	5
C4.Increasingly concerned about my education and career choices.	1	2	3	4	5
C5.Plan how to achieve my goal.	1	2	3	4	5
C6.Care about my life plan.	1	2	3	4	5
C7.Explore my surroundings.	1	2	3	4	5
C8.Look for opportunities to grow on your own.	1	2	3	4	5
C9.Investigate the possible options before choosing.	1	2	3	4	5
C10.Explore different ways of doing something.	1	2	3	4	5
C11.Explore the issues I care about.	1	2	3	4	5
C12.Be curious about new opportunities.	1	2	3	4	5
C13.Stay happy.	1	2	3	4	5
C14.Make your own decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
C15.Take responsibility for your actions.	1	2	3	4	5
C16.Stick to your beliefs.	1	2	3	4	5
C17.Believe in yourself.	1	2	3	4	5
C18.Do what I think is right.	1	2	3	4	5
C19.Accomplish tasks efficiently.	1	2	3	4	5
C20.Do what needs to be done.	1	2	3	4	5
C21.Learn new skills.	1	2	3	4	5
C22.Enhance my abilities.	1	2	3	4	5
C23.Overcome difficulties.	1	2	3	4	5
C24.Solve the problem.	1	2	3	4	5