

Applicant Perceptions in Admission Process to Higher Education: The Influence of Social Anxiety

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Abstract : Applicant perceptions are attitudes, feelings, and cognitions which individuals have about selection procedures and have been mostly studied in the context of personnel selection. The main aim of the present study is to expand the understanding of applicant perceptions, using the framework of Organizational Justice Theory, in the domain of selection for higher education. The secondary aim is to explore the relationships between individual differences in social anxiety and applicants' perceptions. The selection process is an accept/reject situation; it was hypothesized that applicants with higher social anxiety would experience negative perceptions and a lower success estimation, especially when subjected to social interaction elements in the process (interview and group simulation). Also, the effects of prior preparation and post-process explanations offered at the end of the selection process were explored. One hundred sixty psychology M.A. program applicants participated in this research, and following the selection process completed questionnaires measuring social anxiety, social exclusion, ratings on several justice dimensions for each of the methods in the selection process, feelings of success, and self-estimation of compatibility. About half of the applicants also received explanations regarding the significance and the aims of the selection process. Results provided support for most of our hypotheses: applicants with higher social anxiety experienced an increased level of social exclusion in the selection process, perceived the selection as less fair and ended with a lower feeling of success relative to those applicants without social anxiety. These relationships were especially salient in the selection procedures which included social interaction. Additionally, preparation for the selection process was positively related to the favorable perception of fairness in the selection process. Finally, contrary to our hypothesis, it was found that explanations did not affect the applicant's perceptions. The results enhance our understanding of which factors affect applicant perceptions in applicants to higher education studies and contribute uniquely to the understanding of the effect of social anxiety on different aspects of selection experienced by applicants. The findings clearly show that some individuals may be predisposed to react unfavorably to certain selection situations. In an age of increasing awareness towards fairness in evaluation and selection and hiring procedures, these findings may be of relevance and may contribute to the design of future personnel selection methods in general and of higher education selection in particular.

Keywords : applicant perceptions, selection and assessment, organizational justice theory, social anxiety

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