

# How Is Middle-Class Parents' Education Anxiety Generated? A Study Based on a Survey of Home Education of Junior Secondary School Students in 8 Provinces and Cities

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**Abstract:** Drawing on a 2022 survey of home education of junior secondary school students in China's eight provincial administrative regions, this study seeks to examine the chief factors influencing the generation of education anxiety in Chinese middle-class parents using a moderated mediation model. Research findings include that: (1) education anxiety is pervasive among middle-class parents who exhibit high levels of education anxiety but low levels of education involvement; (2) the parent's perception of educational stratification can significantly predict their education anxiety; (3) the relationship between the parent's perception of educational stratification and their education anxiety is mediated by their expectation of child education; (4) the parent's perception of educational competition has a moderating effect on the relationship between their educational expectation and education anxiety.

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**Keywords:** Parental Educational Anxiety, Educational Stratification, Middle-Class Parents, Parental Involvement

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## Introduction

**E**DUCATION anxiety is currently pervasive among Chinese parents, particularly Chinese middle-class parents, who are typically overly concerned with the role of education in social stratification and mobility (i.e., their perceptions of education stratification). Middle-class parents pay inordinate attention to the education of their children, leading to an ongoing increase in education anxiety among them. This study focuses on examining the chief factors for the generation of middle-class parents' education anxiety with the view to offering implications for education anxiety alleviation in this group.

### Research Hypotheses

*H 1: The parent's perception of educational stratification is an effective predictor of their education anxiety. Those who endorse educational stratification have higher levels of anxiety about their children's education.*

*H 2: The parent's educational expectation mediates the relationship between their perception of educational stratification and their education anxiety.*

*H 3: The parent's perception of educational competition has a moderating effect on the relationship between their educational expectations and education anxiety. The correlation between educational expectations and education anxiety is more significant among parents with more intense feelings of educational competition.*

## Research Methodology

### *Data Sources*

This study sourced data from a 2022 survey of home education of junior secondary school students in eight provincial administrative regions by the research group of the project "Education Anxiety of the New-Generation Middle-Class Parents," supported by the China National Social Sciences Fund. In this study, we define the middle class as the group of people who are employed as middle- and lower-level cadres in public organizations and middle-level management of large businesses, with a college or above education background and with an annual household income of 100,000 - 960,000 RMB. According to these screening criteria, a sample of 4,913 middle-class families was obtained.

### *Establishing Variables*

In this study, the parent's perception of educational stratification is the independent variable, indicated by the degree to which the interviewed parent agrees with the notion that education is the most important channel for social mobility. Parental educational anxiety is the dependent variable, measured with the Parental Educational Anxiety Scale developed by the said research group. The parent's educational expectation is the mediation variable, indicated by the parent's attitudes toward their children's enrollment in general high schools, prestigious high schools, and top-rank universities. The parent's perception of educational competition is the moderation variable. In addition, this study controls family-related as well as student-related factors that can potentially affect the parent's education anxiety.

## ***Data Analysis***

The study conducts empirical analysis of the theoretical models it proposes using the SPSS PROCESS program developed by Hayes and the path analysis method. Model 4 is used to test the mediating effect of the parent's educational expectation on the relationship between their perception of educational stratification and their education anxiety. Model 14 is used to test the moderating effect of the parent's perception of educational competition on the relationship between their educational expectation and their education anxiety.

## **Research Findings**

(i) Education anxiety is pervasive among Chinese middle-class parents, who display high levels of education anxiety and low education involvement. The child's academic performance and physical and mental health are the primary sources of education anxiety of the parent; supervision of the child's homework completion is the chief form of parental educational involvement. (ii) The parent's endorsement of educational stratification positively predicts their education anxiety. (iii) The parent's educational expectation mediates the relationship between their perception of educational stratification and education anxiety, and the direct mediating effect is much higher than the indirect effect. (iv) The parent's perception of educational competition moderates the relationship between their educational expectation and education anxiety.

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