

## ***THE INFLUENCE OF ADULT ATTACHMENT ON MENTAL WELL-BEING IN YOUNG ADULTS***

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### **Abstract**

Mental health problems in young adults continue to increase in Indonesia, especially issues related to relationships with others. This study aims to examine the effect of adult attachment on mental well-being in young adults. Data collection was conducted in the form of a survey using the Adult Attachment Style Questionnaire and The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale. Participants in this study were 302 people aged 18 to 40 years who lived in Jabodetabek. The data analysis used multiple linear regression. The results of this study indicate that overall attachment style has a significant effect on mental well-being. Secure attachment ( $\chi^2(1) = 272.02, p < .001$ ) and dismissing attachment ( $\chi^2(1) = 15.08, p < .001$ ) both significantly contributed to positively predict mental well-being. In contrast, fearful attachment ( $\chi^2(1) = 11.37, p = .001$ ) and preoccupied attachment ( $\chi^2(1) = 4.58, p = .032$ ) had a significant negative influence on mental well-being. These findings will provide implications for improving the mental well-being of young adults by considering their attachments in adulthood and, can be a reference for professionals to develop psychological interventions for mental well-being.

*Keywords: Adult Attachment, Mental Well-Being, Young Adulthood*

### **Abstrak**

Permasalahan kesehatan mental pada dewasa muda masih terus meningkat di Indonesia, terutama permasalahan yang berkaitan dengan hubungan dengan orang lain. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji pengaruh kelekatan orang dewasa terhadap kesejahteraan mental pada dewasa muda. Pengumpulan data dilakukan dalam bentuk survei dengan menggunakan Instrumen *Adult Attachment Style Questionnaire* dan *The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale*. Partisipan dalam penelitian ini adalah 302 orang dengan rentang usia 18 hingga 40 tahun yang berdomisili di Jabodetabek. Analisis data yang digunakan adalah regresi linier berganda. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa keseluruhan *attachment style* memiliki pengaruh signifikan terhadap *mental well-being*. *Secure attachment* ( $\chi^2(1) = 272.02, p < .001$ ) dan *dismissing attachment* ( $\chi^2(1) = 15.08, p < .001$ ) keduanya secara signifikan berkontribusi dalam memprediksi *mental well-being*, sedangkan *fearful Attachment* ( $\chi^2(1) = 11.37, p = .001$ ) dan *preoccupied attachment* ( $\chi^2(1) = 4.58, p = .032$ ) memiliki pengaruh negatif yang signifikan terhadap *mental well-being*. Temuan ini akan memberikan implikasi untuk meningkatkan *mental well-being* orang dewasa muda dengan mempertimbangkan keterikatan mereka pada masa dewasa, dan dapat menjadi referensi bagi para tenaga profesional untuk mengembangkan intervensi psikologis untuk *mental well-being*.

*Kata kunci: Gaya Kelekatan Dewasa, Kesejahteraan Mental, Dewasa Muda*

## **1. Introduction**

It is essential to remember the following information young adults face numerous challenges when adapting to changes in life, such as living independently, managing their expenses, adjusting to a new college or workplace,

and establishing relationships, all of which can affect their mental well-being. According to a study on young adults, 88% of individuals experienced depression, and 95.4% experienced anxiety. Furthermore, the study found that over 80% of respondents faced difficulties in interacting with people around them and in intimate relationships (Kaligis et al., 2021). Another study conducted by Samosir (2021) on mental health in adulthood and the elderly revealed that the young adult age group (under 40 years) was the largest group experiencing mental disorders, with a rate of 23.74%.

According to research by Vigo, Thornicroft, and Atun (2016), mental health problems and disorders have a significant impact on global public health and require serious attention. Issues such as depression and anxiety are common among young adults. However, being free from mental problems is not the sole indicator of good mental health. Mental well-being encompasses positive emotional, psychological, and social health, characterized by feelings of satisfaction, resilience, and the ability to effectively cope with life's challenges (Gautam et al., 2024). This includes experiencing positive emotions, having a sense of purpose, and engaging in fulfilling relationships and activities. Mental well-being is crucial for supporting the productivity of young adults in pursuing their life goals (Biddle et al., 2019).

Most often, society assumes that young adults who in relationship are happier than single. However, a single individual can report having a quality life and being happy, particularly when their neuroticism level is low and their quality of friendship is meaningful (Walsh et al., 2024). In addition, Tan et al (2023) stated that commitment readiness significantly impacts the psychological well-being of people in a dating relationship. People who are ready to be committed reported having higher psychological well-being scores than single. However, single individuals reported higher scores in psychological well-being than people who were not fully ready to be in a committed relationship. Furthermore, In the other previous study, young adults who engaged in casual relationships (sex without commitment) did not affect their psychological well-being score (Eisenberg et al., 2009). The cultural differences between the studies conducted in Western and Eastern cultures in Indonesia are significant and need further exploration.

Early life experiences, particularly the child's relationship with the primary caregiver (referred to as attachment), are important factors that influence mental health in adulthood (Stovall-McClough & Dozier, 2016; Zhang et al., 2022). Attachment also plays a crucial role in influencing an individual's psychological well-being (Nourialegha, 2020). Individuals with secure attachment tend to have good interpersonal relationships, a strong sense of purpose, and self-acceptance, as well as adequate mastery of their environment (Sagone, et al., 2023). They are less concerned about rejection or abandonment and feel comfortable both depending on others and being depended on by others (Zhang et al., 2022). Additionally, individuals with secure attachment tend to have the highest psychological well-being and healthier emotional regulation abilities (Salinas-Quiroz et al., 2023).

Preoccupied attachment refers to the fear of being abandoned by a partner, an excessive need for approval, and difficulty accepting rejection. Individuals with this type are characterized by maladaptive strategies when faced with stress that involves increased sensitivity and unhealthy interpretations of negative thoughts, emotions, and perceived threats in the environment (Gardner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2018). In addition, individuals with preoccupied attachments show low levels of self-esteem (Kawamoto, 2020). On the other hand, avoidance is referred to as dismissing attachment, which refers to the fear of dependence and intimacy, excessive need for independence, and difficulty opening up. This type is characterized by a deactivation strategy to manage stress, which involves efforts to suppress or distance unpleasant thoughts, emotions, and threats in the environment (Andriopoulos & Kafetsios, 2015). Individuals with dismissing attachment have difficulty managing interactions with others around them. Maladaptive strategies in managing stress, characterized by insecure attachment (preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful), are similar to negative cognitive biases that are predictors of mental health problems (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012). This is in line with research by Mortazavizadeh & Forstmeier (2018), which states that individuals with insecure attachment increase difficulty in managing emotions and increase the risk of developing mental disorders.

The relationship between adult attachment and mental problems or disorders has been shown by various studies such as research by Mcdermott et al. (2015) which states that insecure attachment tends to cause more problems, such as depression, eating disorders, substance use, anxiety, difficulty in social interaction, and academic stress. Meanwhile, research by Shen, Liu, and Brat (2021) shows that adult attachment can affect the relationship between self-esteem and mental health problems. In addition, Yang et al. (2024) explained that adult attachment has a direct influence on mental health during COVID-19, therefore it is important to provide social

support, especially for individuals with insecure attachment because it will be useful to minimize the emergence of mental problems.

Recently, there has been research on adult attachment and its relationship with mental well-being. In the context of close relationship, Stevenson, Millings, and Emerson (2019) highlight that adult attachment is linked to mindfulness and its impact on emotional regulation in young adults. Jaurequi's study in 2019 also supports this, showing that insecure attachment and mindfulness are interconnected with mental health. Additionally, Zhang et al. (2022) explained that individuals with insecure attachment experience more life satisfaction and lower self-esteem. Despite the prevalence of mental health issues, there is limited exploration of mental well-being in young Indonesian adults, particularly about adult attachments. Therefore, this study aims to further analyze the influence of adult attachment on the mental well-being of young adults.

## **2. Method**

### **Research design**

The study utilized a quantitative method with a survey design to assess the impact of adult attachment on mental well-being in young adults.

### **Participants**

The study included 302 young adult respondents between the ages of 20 and 40 who were unmarried. Table 2.1 shows that the average age of the respondents is in the young adult range, and the majority of the respondents were women (74% compared to 26% men). In terms of relationship status, 47.7% of the respondents were currently in a relationship, 32.5% were not in any relationship, 11.3% had relationships without status, 4.3% were married, 2.6% were in the friendzone, and 1.7% were in friends with benefits. The data was collected using convenience sampling and questionnaires were distributed online via WhatsApp, Instagram, and Line using Google Forms. The research team used the Attachment Style Questionnaire and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) as research instruments that had been adapted into the Indonesian version to measure the variables.

### **Instruments**

In this study, we used the Attachment Style Questionnaire developed by Hofstra & Oudenhuven and adapted by Fitriana and Fitria (2016) to measure the adult attachment variable. This questionnaire use 5-scale likert, no reversed item. Each attachment style is assessed by averaging every item in the dimension. According to Fitriana and Fitria (2016), secure attachment has a Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.650 with a corrected total item correlation ranging from 0.511 to 0.774. However, we decided not to use one item with a correlation below 0.20. Fearful attachment type has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.815 with a corrected total item correlation between 0.563 and 0.698. Dismissing attachment type has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.646 with a corrected total item correlation ranging from 0.339 to 0.542. Preoccupied attachment type has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.558 with a corrected total item correlation between 0.284 and 0.675, and two items with a correlation below 0.20 were not used.

The definitions used to describe each attachment style are adapted from Polek (2008). There are 6 items to measure the secure attachment type, with an example item being "I feel comfortable being in a close relationship.". The higher the score in this dimension, the more comfortable and secure the person is in forming close emotional bonds, depending on others, and having others depend on them without fear of abandonment or rejection. For the fearful attachment type, there are 5 items, with an example item being "I am careful to get involved in a close relationship because I am afraid of getting hurt.". The higher the score in this dimension, the more ambivalent and wary the person is about forming close relationships, often desiring intimacy but struggling with trust and fear of getting hurt. Additionally, there are 5 items for the preoccupied attachment type, with an example item being "I often wonder if people like me,.". The higher the score in this dimension, the more anxious and insecure the person is about their relationships, often seeking closeness and intimacy more intensely than others reciprocate, and fearing that others do not value them as highly as they value others. Lastly, 5 items for the dismissing attachment type, with an example item being "I prefer that other people do not depend on me and I do not have to depend on them.". The higher the score in this dimension, the more self-reliant and detached the person is, preferring independence over close emotional connections and often avoiding dependency on others.

The measurement of mental well-being uses the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) developed by the University of Warwick and the University of Edinburgh in 2008. This scale has a reliability coefficient ( $\alpha$ ) of .650 and has been adapted into an Indonesian version. The instrument consists of 14 items that assess an individual's mental well-being (thoughts and feelings) over the past two weeks. All items are rated on a Likert Scale from 1 to 5 (1 = never, 5 = always). An example item is "I am confident in what I stand for."

### Analysis Technique

This research utilized the Generalized Linear Model (GLM) to examine the connection between different attachment styles and mental well-being. The analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics software (Version 26, IBM Corp). The decision to use GLM was based on the following reasons:

1. **Linearity and Distribution Assumptions:** Initial analysis revealed violations of the linearity assumptions necessary for multiple regression. Additionally, although the dependent variable (mental well-being) showed slight skewness, it still fell within an acceptable range for normal distribution (between -2 and 2) (Hair et al., 2022), which supports the use of GLM with a normal distribution and identity link function.
2. **Scale Treatment:** The scales used to measure attachment style and mental well-being, while originally ordinal, were treated as interval data based on summed scores. This approach allows for a more nuanced analysis by the interval nature of the data.
3. **Model Flexibility:** GLM can accommodate deviations from normality and multiple levels of measurement, making it well-suited for psychological research where such conditions are common (Bono et al., 2021).

## 3. Results

### Demography

**Tabel 1. Participants' Demography**

|                                 |                           |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Age</b>                      | M = 22.83 (SD = 3.45)     |
| <b>Gender</b>                   | <b>Percentage (N=302)</b> |
| Male                            | 80 (26%)                  |
| Female                          | 222 (74%)                 |
| <b>Status</b>                   | <b>Percentage (N=302)</b> |
| Single                          | 98 (32.5%)                |
| Dating                          | 144 (47.7%)               |
| Relationship without commitment | 34 (11.3%)                |
| Married                         | 13 (4.3%)                 |
| Friendzone                      | 8 (2.6%)                  |
| Friends with benefit            | 5 (1.7%)                  |

Participants in this study had an average age of 22 years. Most were female (74%). There were various romantic relationship statuses. From 302 young adults residing in *Jabodetabek* (Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi), most were dating with the opposite sex (47.7%), and the fewest were in friends with benefits (1.7%)

### Model Information

The study utilized a General Linear Model (GLM) to explore the influence of attachment styles on mental well-being. The model included four independent variables: Secure Attachment, Fearful Attachment, Preoccupied Attachment, and Dismissing Attachment. The dependent variable was the total score of Mental Well-Being, assumed to follow a normal distribution (skewness is still within acceptable range (Hair dkk., 2022), which is -1.12). The identity link function was applied in the analysis, suitable for continuous outcome variables.

### Omnibus Test

The omnibus test provided a global check of the model's utility by comparing it against a null model with only the intercept. The likelihood ratio chi-square was significant,  $\chi^2(4) = 245,8$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating that the inclusion of the four attachment styles significantly improved the fit of the model beyond the intercept alone.

### Test of Model Effects

**Table 2. Test of Model Effects**

| Adult Attachment | Wald Chi-Square | p-value |
|------------------|-----------------|---------|
| (Intercept)      | 11.013          | .001    |
| Secure           | 272.018         | .000    |
| Fearful          | 11.370          | .001    |
| Preoccupied      | 4.575           | .032    |
| Dismissing       | 15.083          | .000    |

Type III Wald chi-square tests were conducted to evaluate the impact of each predictor while controlling for the other variables in the model. Results revealed that Secure Attachment ( $\chi^2(1) = 272.02$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and Dismissing Attachment ( $\chi^2(1) = 15.08$ ,  $p < .001$ ) both significantly contributed to predicting mental well-being. Meanwhile, fearful Attachment ( $\chi^2(1) = 11.37$ ,  $p = .001$ ) and preoccupied attachment ( $\chi^2(1) = 4.58$ ,  $p = .032$ ) had significant negative effects on well-being.

### Parameter Estimates

**Tabel 3. Parameter Estimates**

| Variable    | B      | Standard Error | Wald Chi-Square | p-value |
|-------------|--------|----------------|-----------------|---------|
| (Intercept) | 11.781 | 3.5500         | 11.013          | .001    |
| Secure      | 12.715 | .7710          | 272.018         | .000    |
| Fearful     | -2.093 | .6207          | 11.370          | .001    |
| Preoccupied | -1.718 | .8033          | 4.575           | .032    |
| Dismissing  | 2.467  | .6351          | 15.083          | .000    |

The parameter estimates indicated the direction and magnitude of relationships between each attachment style and mental well-being. The model intercept, representing the expected value of mental well-being when all predictors are at zero, was estimated at 11,78 (SE = 3.55, 95% CI [4.82, 18.74],  $p = .001$ ). For Secure Attachment, each one-unit increase was associated with an increase of 12,72 points in mental well-being (SE = 0.77, 95% CI [11.2, 14.23],  $p < .001$ ). In contrast, each one-unit increase in Fearful Attachment was associated with a decrease of 2.09 points in mental well-being (SE = 0.62, 95% CI [-3.31, -0.88],  $p = .001$ ). So was Preoccupied Attachment, where each one-unit increase in Preoccupied Attachment was associated with a 1.72-point decrease in mental well-being (SE = 0.80, 95% CI [-3.29, -0.14],  $p = .032$ ). Dismissing Attachment showed a positive effect, with each one-unit increase corresponding to an increase of 2.47 points in mental well-being (SE = 0.64, 95% CI [41.34, 56.94],  $p < .001$ ). These findings suggest that secure and dismissing attachment styles play crucial roles in enhancing mental well-being, whereas fearful attachment and preoccupied attachment appears to detract from it.

## 4. Discussion

Adult attachment consists of two main dimensions, namely anxiety and avoidance. If anxiety and avoidance are high, it is called a fearful attachment, while if both are low, it is called a secure attachment. In addition, if anxiety is high but avoidance is low, it is called a preoccupied attachment, while if the opposite is true, it is called a dismissing attachment (Polek, 2008). Based on the results of this study, each type of attachment has a significant influence on mental well-being in young adults, which is in line with several previous studies that examined adult attachment and mental well-being or mental health in general.

Secure attachment has a positive influence. It shows that young adults who feel secure in their close relationships and live without high anxiety or strong urges to avoid negative emotions tend to have a strong sense of self and maintain their self-worth without needing validation from their partner. They also take responsibility for themselves, which can be considered good for their mental well-being. This is consistent with previous studies that indicate secure attachment leads to good mental health and well-being in individuals (Karreman & Vingerhoets, 2012; Yang et al., 2024).

People with a dismissing attachment style tend to have better mental well-being. This means that young adults who avoid negative emotions within their relationships without experiencing high anxiety are better at maintaining their self-worth without seeking validation from their partner. They take responsibility for their own negative emotions and do not depend on others (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005; Mortazavizadeh & Forstmeier, 2018). This ability to find happiness and fulfillment within themselves supports their mental well-being. Research suggests that individuals with a dismissing attachment style experience lower levels of distress and depressive feelings, possibly because they anticipate potential discomfort from rejection or neglect (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2005; Cassidy, 2000; Fuendeling, 1998 in Nielsen et al., 2017).

Conversely, fearful attachment has a detrimental impact on the mental well-being of young adults. Young adults with fearful attachments often experience intense anxiety and have a strong tendency to avoid negative emotions, which can impede their ability to function well in daily life. Those with fearful attachments exhibit low levels of social support, emotional control, physical well-being, and sleep quality (Zech et al., 2006). Previous studies have also indicated that fearful attachment, also known as insecure attachment, is a significant risk factor for compromised mental health in individuals (Zech et al., 2006 in Mortazavizadeh Z. et al., 2018).

The preoccupied attachment style, much like the fearful attachment style, harms mental well-being. This means that young adults with high anxiety who do not avoid negative emotions tend to be emotionally reactive in relationships (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2005). They may seek attention, validation, and acceptance from their partners (Salinas-Quiroz et al., 2023). In terms of mental well-being, positive emotions, autonomy, self-acceptance, and self-worth are crucial (Steward-Brown & Janmohamed, 2008). Previous research has indicated that individuals with fearful attachment may struggle with cognitive evaluations, leading to higher levels of anxiety and depression (Salinas-Quiroz et al., 2023) and an increased risk of psychological disorders (Yang et al., 2024).

The influence of adult attachment on mental well-being in this study is not limited to one specific context of status or type of romantic relationship experienced by young adults. It encompasses the status of not having any romantic relationship, dating relationships, marriage relationships, friendzone relationships, friends-with-benefits relationships, and relationships without status. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be specifically attributed to a particular relationship context.

## **5. Conclusion**

The study shows that different types of adult attachment significantly impact the mental well-being of young adults. Secure and dismissing attachment have a positive effect, while fearful and preoccupied attachment have a negative effect on mental well-being. It's important to note that these results are specific to young adults living in the Jabodetabek area, so further research is needed to understand the impact on a broader population. Additionally, future research could investigate the connection between adult attachment, mental well-being, and the type of romantic relationship experienced by young adults in more depth.

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