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The Role of Attachment Style in Psychological Outcomes Among Emerging Adults: A Systematic Literature Review

Zahirah Fatin Absoulth, Latipun, Hanif Akhtar
Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, Malang, Indonesia

Article info

Corresponding Author:

Zahirah Fatin Absoulth
zahirahftn04@gmail.com
Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang

ABSTRACT

Attachment style is a pattern of attachment that develops through an individual's interactions with their primary caregivers and continues to influence psychological development into early adulthood. Various studies have shown that *attachment style* is associated with a range of psychological outcomes. However, these findings remain scattered across different fields of study, limiting a comprehensive understanding of the topic. This systematic review aims to analyze 15 articles examining the role of *attachment style* in various psychological outcomes among emerging adults. The findings indicate that *secure attachment* serves as a protective factor associated with psychological well-being, better mental health, adaptive emotion regulation, positive interpersonal relationship quality, and higher levels of empathy and compassion. In contrast, *attachment anxiety* and *attachment avoidance* are associated with increased vulnerability to depression, anxiety, loneliness, lower psychological well-being, difficulties in establishing intimate relationships, and various interpersonal problems.

Keywords: *Attachment Style, Secure Attachment, Insecure Attachment, Early Adulthood, Systematic Literature Review.*

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INTROUCTION

Attachment style is the result of internalization of an individual's childhood interactions with primary attachment figures, namely parents (Eilert & Buchheim, 2023). Attachment style refers to the pattern of emotional bonds that develop in individuals and influences how they establish closeness, build trust, and interact with others in adulthood. Attachment style was coined by John Bowlby, who stated that humans instinctively form strong emotional bonds for survival. Adult attachment differs from attachment in childhood. Attachment style (Karveli et al., 2023) in adults is generally defined as a consistent set of ways to regulate emotions. This is evident in how individuals direct their attention and express emotions, appraise, and utilize social coping resources when facing

distress. In line with this theory, attachment not only plays a role in childhood but also continues to develop and affects various aspects of an individual's life into adulthood.

Although attachment style first develops in infancy, Bowlby explained that attachment patterns are relatively stable and continue to influence interpersonal relationships into adolescence and adulthood (Sànchez-Julvé et al., 2025). In adulthood, attachment style is no longer reflected only in relationships with parents, but also in romantic relationships, friendships, and other social relations. In the context of adulthood, attachment style is generally classified based on two main dimensions: attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance (Warnock et al., 2024). Based on the high or low levels of these two dimensions, four attachment styles are formed: secure attachment, anxious attachment, avoidant-dismissive, and avoidant-fearful. Individuals with secure attachment tend to feel comfortable building emotional closeness and have trust in their partners and others (Justo-Núñez et al., 2022). Conversely, individuals with attachment anxiety show excessive worry about rejection or loss of relationships, while individuals with attachment avoidance tend to avoid emotional closeness and rely more on themselves. These differences in attachment characteristics cause individuals to show different patterns of psychological and interpersonal functioning during adulthood.

Based on previous research, attachment style can be a risk factor for the emergence of emotional disorders in adulthood, such as depression and anxiety disorders (Lau-Zhu et al., 2023). In interpersonal relationships, individuals with attachment anxiety tend to experience strong surges of negative emotions because they are constantly filled with feelings of anxiety and fear of being rejected or abandoned by their partners, thus tending to express anger excessively and constantly demand attention and reassurance. In contrast, individuals with attachment avoidance are more likely to withdraw, keep their distance, and act cold when the relationship begins to feel "too close" or even when conflict occurs that requires emotional openness (Overall et al., 2022). In general, the results of these previous studies identify that attachment style consistently plays a role in various psychological outcomes in early adulthood. However, the outcomes studied are still very diverse, so the research findings are scattered across various fields of study and have not provided a comprehensive picture of the role of attachment style on various psychological outcomes in the early adult population (Eilert & Buchheim, 2023).

Although research on attachment style has grown rapidly, the characteristics of the populations studied are still very diverse. Some studies involve adolescents, college students, adults in general, married couples, and clinical populations, so the research results do not specifically describe the various outcomes of attachment style in the early adult group. In fact, early adulthood is a developmental phase that has different characteristics and developmental tasks compared to other age groups, thus allowing attachment style to have a distinctive influence on various psychological and interpersonal outcomes. Therefore, a systematic literature review that specifically focuses on the early adult population is needed.

Based on these conditions, a systematic literature review that specifically focuses on the early adult population is needed. The synthesis of published research results is expected

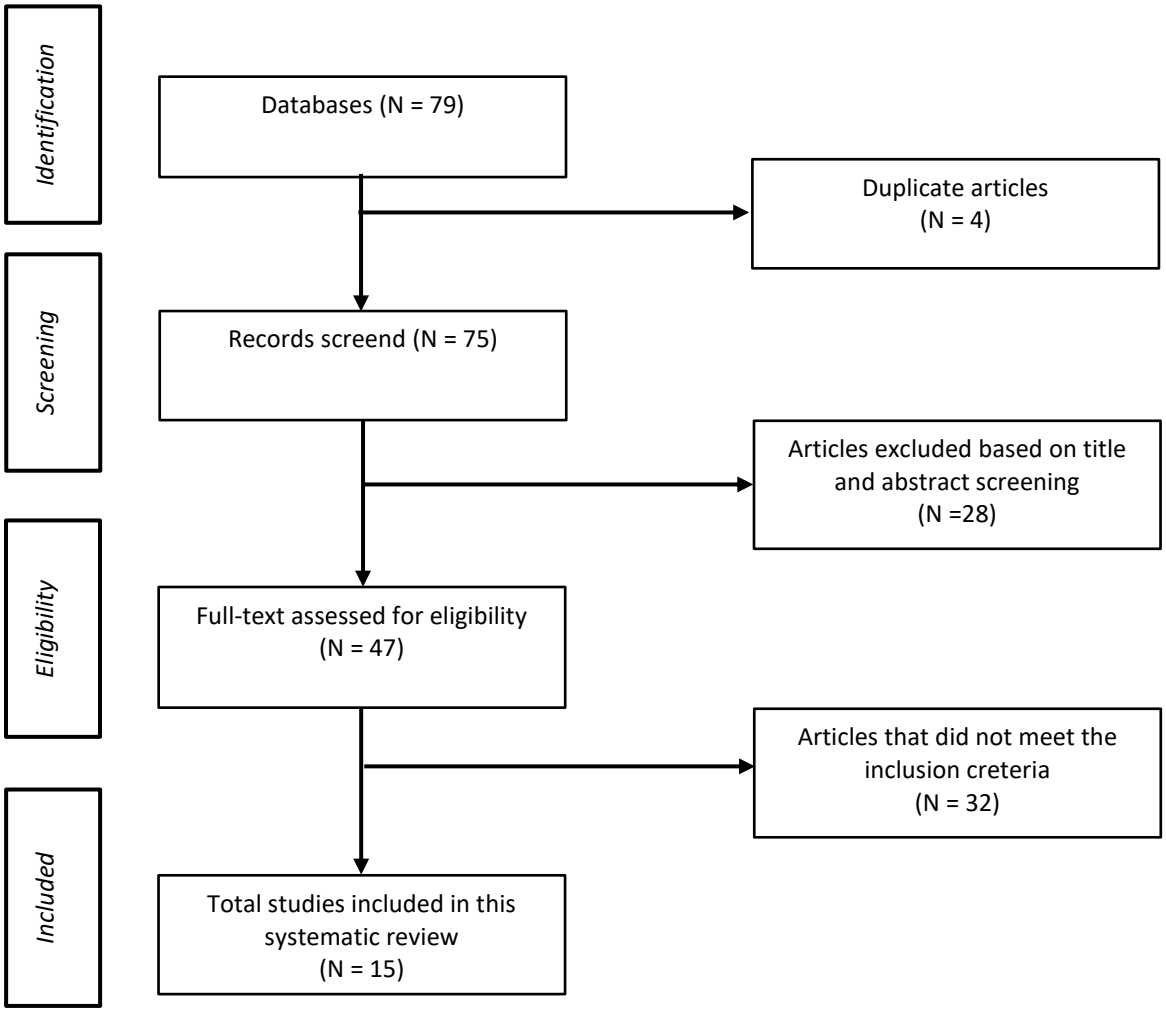
to provide a more comprehensive picture of the various outcomes of attachment style in early adulthood, identify the characteristics of the research that has been conducted, and map the trends of consistent findings and those that still show differences in results. In addition, the systematic literature review is also expected to identify existing research gaps so that it can be used as a basis for determining the direction of future research development on attachment style in early adulthood.

Based on this description, this study aims to conduct a systematic literature review on various outcomes of attachment style in the early adult population. Specifically, this study aims to identify, analyze, and synthesize research results on attachment style outcomes in early adulthood, map the characteristics of the research that has been conducted, and identify research gaps as a basis for recommendations for future research.

METHOD

This article was written using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method. A systematic literature review is a research method that uses systematic procedures to collect, evaluate, integrate, and interpret relevant research findings to answer a specific topic (Page et al., 2021). The review planning was conducted by focusing on journal articles published between 2021 and 2026. In this process, the authors read, noted, analyzed, and processed various relevant research topics. The research question in this article is: what are the psychological outcomes that can be associated with attachment style in the early adult population? Furthermore, the authors determined the search terms used, namely attachment style, attachment for adult, emerging adult, young adult. These search terms were used to search for articles through SagePub, Scopus, ResearchGate, and Google Scholar databases via the Publish or Perish tool. Journals that met the criteria were then collected and examined systematically using Rayyan by screening titles and abstracts, which were subsequently analyzed based on the full-text version of the journals. The journal selection process can be seen in the following figure.

Table 1. PRISMA TABLE



RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Table 2. Systematic Literature Review

No.	Author and Year	Participants and Age	Method	Variables	Psychology Outcome
1	Xu & He (2026)	398 Chinese university students, with a mean age of 20.8 years..	Quantitative cross-sectional study using regression analysis.	Attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance	Marital attitudes

2	Lazinski & Ehrenberg (2024)	359 young adults who were single or in a romantic relationship.	*Mixed methods* (survey interview)	Secure attachment, discomfort with closeness, need for approval, preoccupation with relationships, relationships as secondary	Outlook on marriage
3	Annisa & Dalimunthe (2021)	206 young adults aged 18–30 years who were in a romantic relationship.	Quantitative correlational study using simple linear regression.	Secure attachment, anxious attachment, avoidant attachment	Marriage readiness
4	Pastor-Cerezo & Iborra Cuéllar (2026)	587 adults who were currently in or had previously been in a romantic relationship.	Quantitative cross-sectional study using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and mediation analysis.	Secure attachment, anxious attachment, avoidant attachment	Adult intimacy
5	Ahlan & Sinha (2025)	200 young adults aged 18–30 years who were currently dating or had previously dated.	Quantitative correlational study using linear regression.	Confidence, discomfort with closeness, need for approval, preoccupation with relationships, relationships as secondary	Relationship satisfaction
6	Shahzad et al. (2024)	400 married individuals aged over 25 years.	Quantitative correlational study using multiple regression.	Attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance	Marital satisfaction
7	Yang et al. (2025)	772 young adult participants.	Quantitative cross-sectional study.	Attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance	Commitment readiness

8	Watters et al. (2025)	307 university students aged 18-19 years.	Quantitative cross-sectional study	Attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance	Depression and anxiety.
9	Alfalathi et al. (2025)	±480 young adults aged 18-40 years who were currently in a romantic relatiionship	Quantitative survey study.	Secure attachment, attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance	Romantic relationship dynamics, conflict, trust, and relationship stability.
1	Sogone et al. (2023)	Young adults and adults aged 18-40 year who were currently in a romantic relationship	Quantitative cross-sectional study.	Secure, fearful, preoccupied, dismissing attachment	Psychological well-being
1	Rahman & Hoesni (2023)	66 unmarried young adults agaed 18-29 years.	Quantitative cross-sectional study.	Attachment was not directly measured.	Marriage Readiness
1	Saragi et al. (2025)	Five young adult women aged 20–35 years from broken-home families.	Descriptive qualitative study.	Not directly measured.	Marriage anxiety
1	Sekowski, M. M., & Gambin, M. (2025)	498 adults aged 18–65 years.	Quantitative cross-sectional survey.	Hypomentalization (difficulty understanding one's own and others' thoughts and emotions), depressive symptoms, and suicidality.	Depression, suicidal behavior, mentalization, and reflective functioning.
1	Mayangsari et al. (2024)	302 young adults in the Greater Jakarta	Quantitative cross-sectional survey using	Adult attachment (secure, dismissing, fearful, preoccupied)	Mental Well-being

		(Jabodetabek) area of Indonesia, aged 18–40 years.	multiple linear regression analysis.		
1	Metts, et al. (2024)	270 young adults in the United States aged 18–19 years.	Quantitative longitudinal study (30 months) using a Cross-Lagged Panel Model (CLPM)	Attachment security, attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance; cognitive reappraisal; expressive suppression	Emotion regulation, depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms, and general distress.

Table 1 demonstrates that *attachment style* plays a broad role in various psychological outcomes among emerging adults, ranging from mental health and interpersonal relationship quality to orientations toward romantic commitment and marriage (Watters et al., 2025; Sogone et al., 2023; Xu & He, 2026). These findings indicate that the function of attachment in emerging adulthood is no longer limited to relationships with caregivers but has developed into a psychological framework that influences how individuals understand themselves, others, and the interpersonal relationships they maintain.

One of the most consistently identified outcomes across studies is mental health and psychological well-being. Individuals with *attachment anxiety* and *attachment avoidance* tend to exhibit higher levels of depression and anxiety, as well as lower psychological well-being, compared with individuals with *secure attachment* (Watters et al., 2025; Sogone et al., 2023). These findings suggest that insecure attachment patterns may represent psychological vulnerability factors in emerging adulthood. Conversely, *secure attachment* serves as a protective factor because it is associated with better emotion regulation abilities and the use of more adaptive coping strategies when dealing with psychological stress (Sogone et al., 2023; Watters et al., 2025).

These differences are subsequently reflected in the quality of interpersonal relationships established by individuals during emerging adulthood. Individuals with *secure attachment* tend to be better able to build trust, maintain emotional closeness, and develop stable and satisfying (Fathima Ahlam T S & Anjana Sinha, 2025). In contrast, individuals with *attachment anxiety* more frequently demonstrate a strong need for closeness and reassurance from their partners, whereas individuals with *attachment avoidance* tend to maintain emotional distance and avoid dependence on others (Pastor-Cerezo & Iborra Cuéllar, 2026). These differing patterns are ultimately associated with variations in relationship satisfaction, intimacy quality, trust in partners, and romantic relationship stability among emerging adults (Aminah Alfalathi et al., 2025).

Beyond influencing existing relationships, *attachment style* is also associated with how individuals perceive long-term commitment and the institution of marriage. Individuals with *secure attachment* tend to have more positive orientations toward romantic relationships, commitment, and marriage because they perceive interpersonal relationships as sources of support and emotional security (Lazinski & Ehrenberg, 2024). In contrast, *attachment anxiety* is more frequently associated with ambivalence toward commitment due to a strong need for closeness accompanied by a fear of rejection or losing a partner (Yang et al., 2025). Meanwhile, individuals with *attachment avoidance* tend to perceive long-term commitment as a threat to their independence, leading to more negative attitudes toward long-term relationships and marriage (Xu & He, 2026; Lazinski & Ehrenberg, 2024).

These differences in relationship orientations also contribute to marriage readiness among emerging adults. Individuals with *secure attachment* generally demonstrate greater marriage readiness because they possess better communication, conflict resolution, and interpersonal adaptation skills than individuals with *insecure attachment (Annisa & Dalimunthe, 2021)*. Conversely, negative relational experiences and insecurity in relationships tend to be associated with doubts about marriage, lower readiness to establish commitment, and increased anxiety about future married life (Rahman & Hoesni, 2023; Saragi et al., 2025).

Interestingly, several studies indicate that these psychological outcomes do not occur independently but are interconnected. A reduced ability to establish emotional closeness may affect relationship satisfaction, which may subsequently contribute to lower marriage readiness and more negative attitudes toward marriage (Xu & He, 2026). Conversely, the ability to establish secure and supportive relationships may enhance psychological well-being, interpersonal relationship quality, and readiness to navigate developmental tasks during emerging adulthood (Sagone et al., 2023).

Overall, the findings of this systematic literature review indicate that *secure attachment* is consistently associated with more adaptive psychological outcomes, including higher psychological well-being, better relationship quality, greater relationship satisfaction, and increased readiness to establish long-term commitment and marriage (Sogone et al., 2023; Ahlan & Sinha, 2025; Annisa & Dalimunthe, 2021). Conversely, *attachment anxiety* and *attachment avoidance* tend to be associated with less adaptive psychological outcomes, such as increased depression and anxiety, lower relationship quality, difficulties establishing intimacy, and more negative attitudes toward commitment and marriage (Watters et al., 2025). Therefore, *attachment style* can be understood as a developmental factor that contributes significantly to individuals' ability to navigate various developmental tasks during emerging adulthood.

DISCUSSION

According to the attachment theory proposed by John Bowlby (Annisa & Dalimunthe, 2021), children's experiences of interaction with their primary care givers shape attachment styles, which subsequently influence how individuals perceive themselves, others, and

interpersonal relationships throughout their lives. These experiences give rise to internal working models, which refer to beliefs about oneself and others. Attachment style reflects the degree of security experienced in interpersonal relationships. In the development of adult attachment theory, attachment style is defined as a pattern of expectations, emotions, and behaviors that emerge in close relationships (Carli et al., 2023). These patterns are reflected in levels of anxiety about rejection (*attachment anxiety*) and avoidance of emotional closeness (*attachment avoidance*).

The most prominent finding indicates that secure attachment serves as a protective factor for mental health and psychological adjustment (Mayangsari et al., 2024). Individuals with secure attachment tend to demonstrate better emotion regulation, higher psychological well-being, greater life satisfaction, and more positive interpersonal relationship quality than individuals with insecure attachment (Metts et al., 2024). Conversely, the two primary dimensions of insecure attachment, namely attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance, are consistently associated with increased vulnerability to various psychological difficulties, including depression, anxiety, psychological distress, loneliness, and lower life satisfaction. These findings suggest that attachment patterns established early in life continue to influence individuals' psychological functioning into adulthood (S. Yang et al., 2024).

In the context of interpersonal relationships, most studies indicate that individuals with secure attachment experience better romantic relationship quality than those with insecure attachment (Yu et al., 2025). This is reflected in greater trust in partners, more effective communication, the ability to resolve conflicts constructively, and higher levels of relationship commitment and satisfaction (Fadli et al., 2025). In contrast, individuals with attachment anxiety tend to exhibit fear of rejection, a strong need for acceptance and validation from their partners, and emotional dependence. Meanwhile, individuals with attachment avoidance are more likely to maintain emotional distance, avoid intimacy, and experience difficulties establishing closeness with their partners (F. Yang et al., 2024). These characteristics make individuals with insecure attachment more vulnerable to conflict and dissatisfaction in romantic relationships.

The review findings also indicate that attachment style is associated with various other psychological capacities, including empathy, reflective functioning, compassion, and the ability to understand other people's emotional states. Individuals with secure attachment generally demonstrate better mentalizing abilities, enabling them to understand others' perspectives, express empathy, and establish supportive social relationships (Mayangsari et al., 2024). Conversely, individuals with insecure attachment tend to experience difficulties understanding and regulating their own emotional states and those of others (F. Yang et al., 2024). These limitations may increase the risk of interpersonal conflict and hinder the development of healthy social relationships.

Although most studies demonstrate similar patterns of findings, some variations remain evident. These differences may be influenced by sample characteristics, cultural backgrounds, participants' age ranges, the types of relationships examined, and the attachment assessment approaches employed. Some studies classify attachment into

secure, anxious, avoidant, and disorganized categories, whereas others adopt a dimensional approach focusing on attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. These conceptual differences may contribute to variations in the magnitude of associations between variables, even when the overall direction of the relationships remains relatively consistent.

Overall, the findings of this systematic literature review indicate that attachment style is an important predictor of various psychological outcomes. Secure attachment serves as a protective factor that supports emotion regulation, psychological well-being, mental health, and interpersonal relationship quality (Metts et al., 2024; Mayangsari et al., 2024; Carli et al., 2024). Conversely, attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance constitute risk factors associated with increased vulnerability to various psychological and interpersonal difficulties (Metts et al., 2024; Fadli et al., 2025). These findings further reinforce the relevance of attachment theory in explaining psychological development and provide practical implications for developing psychological intervention programs aimed at enhancing attachment security to support mental health and the quality of interpersonal relationships.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this systematic literature review indicate that *attachment style* plays a broad and consistent role in various psychological outcomes among emerging adults. *Secure attachment* was found to be associated with higher levels of psychological well-being, more adaptive emotion regulation, better interpersonal relationship quality, healthier intimacy-building abilities, and more positive orientations toward romantic commitment and marriage. Conversely, *attachment anxiety* and *attachment avoidance* are associated with an increased risk of depression, anxiety, loneliness, lower psychological well-being, difficulties establishing intimate relationships, and various interpersonal problems. These findings suggest that attachment patterns formed early in life continue to influence individuals' psychological functioning as they enter emerging adulthood.

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