

Analysis of attachment styles and relationship dynamics in early adulthood: Implications for the need for pre-marital counselling

Siti Aminah Alfalathi*

Universitas Indraprasta PGRI
Jakarta Timur, Indonesia

Zara Mayra

Universitas Indraprasta PGRI
Jakarta Timur, Indonesia

Neng Triyaningsih Sutaryaman

Universitas Indraprasta PGRI
Jakarta Timur, Indonesia

Rindang Wahjuningtjas

Universitas Indraprasta PGRI
Jakarta Timur, Indonesia

Dery Purnama Saefudin

Universitas Indraprasta PGRI
Jakarta Timur, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author. sitiaminahalfalathi@gmail.com

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Abstract

Pre-marital counselling is increasingly recognized as important in Indonesia due to the need for young adults to develop emotional readiness and relational skills before marriage. However, the influence of attachment styles and relationship conditions on counselling needs is not well understood. This study examined the distribution of attachment styles, relationship conditions, and demographics, as well as their impact on the perceived need for pre-marital counselling. A cross-sectional survey was conducted among 480 young adults aged 18–40, using self-report questionnaires. Rare-event penalised logistic regression was employed to account for the highly unbalanced outcome. Results showed moderate levels of secure, disorganized, anxious, and avoidant attachment, with secure attachment slightly more common. Almost all participants (99.4%) reported needing pre-marital counselling. Regression analysis indicated that higher secure attachment scores were positively associated with counselling needs (OR = 1.82). Most participants were single, without children, and reported neutral to positive relationship conditions. These findings suggest young adults recognize the value of pre-marital counseling for emotional preparation and relational skill development, highlighting the need for interventions tailored to individual attachment profiles. Counseling programs should be culturally sensitive, adaptable, and attachment-informed, emphasizing communication, conflict resolution, and self-reflection to support long-term relationship satisfaction. Future research should investigate how cultural norms, family values, and religious beliefs shape perceptions and needs regarding pre-marital counselling, enabling the tailoring of interventions to the local context.

Keywords: *attachment styles, early adulthood relationships, pre-marital counselling, relationship dynamics, emotional preparation.*



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Introduction

In the study of human development, early adulthood is considered a crucial phase because it lays the foundation for individuals to establish their self-identity, independence, and the quality of long-term relationships. This period, spanning the age range of 21 to 40 years, marks a transition from adolescence to adulthood. It is marked by physical, intellectual, and social changes, as well as the need to adjust to new life patterns, including forming meaningful relationships with the opposite sex (Hurlock, 2000, in Yenita, 2022). This stage also presents numerous psychosocial challenges, including achieving independence, developing a career, and forming more serious romantic relationships (Lailiyah et al., 2025).

One fundamental aspect that determines this readiness is the attachment pattern, which is the emotional bond formed since childhood and continues to influence how individuals build relationships in adulthood. Attachment theory explains that the attachment system functions to maintain emotional and physical closeness between a child and a caregiver, and these early experiences are internalised as a prototype for future relationships (Musetti et al., 2022). In fact, anxious attachment often makes parents use persuasive ways to control a child's behaviour, which reduces the child's ability to control themselves, even in simple things like eating habits. This situation illustrates that early attachment patterns can have a lasting impact on self-regulation skills and emotional stability as a person enters the next stage of development (Powell et al., 2017). This understanding was later developed in the adult context by creating a four-dimensional model of attachment, expanding the early concept of child attachment to explain adult relationship dynamics (Walker et al., 2020).

Building on the understanding of attachment patterns, it becomes clear that these early emotional bonds have a lasting influence on how individuals approach romantic relationships and, ultimately, marriage. Patterns of secure or insecure attachment shape emotional regulation, communication, and expectations within a partnership, which are critical for marital satisfaction and stability. Therefore, examining attachment provides a valuable framework for understanding the emotional and psychological readiness of young couples entering marriage, particularly in contexts like Indonesia, where marriage is considered a significant social milestone.

In the Indonesian context, marriage remains a significant milestone in social life. However, there is often a gap between social readiness for marriage and the emotional or psychological readiness of young couples. Internal conflicts can arise due to ineffective communication, emotional immaturity, and differences in expectations, which are common factors in marital breakdown. Emotional instability in women significantly contributes to marital instability, and programs that emphasise emotional stability for women and social adjustment for men are considered important to reduce the risk of divorce (Gherashiran et al., 2022). Moreover, emotional unpreparedness is also considered a major risk factor for marital failure, so paying attention to the emotional stability of young couples is crucial (Nindyasari & Herawati, 2019). Research also shows that well-designed counseling interventions can strengthen family resilience, stabilize emotions, and improve relationship quality even when couples face economic pressure. With integrated psychosocial support and financial guidance, couples are more capable of restoring harmony, maintaining stability, and building a supportive family environment (Aryani et al., 2025). This condition shows that preparation for marriage should not only focus on economic or administrative aspects, but also needs to consider deeper psychological aspects, especially related to emotional attachment.

In addition, relationship status also affects an individual's emotional needs. Those who are married, dating, or single face different challenges in building relationships (Lindawati, 2019;

Mulyani & Sari, 2024). Married couples deal with long-term adaptation, people who are dating are in the process of negotiating commitment, while singles focus more on self-preparation (Masudah & Yoenanto, 2023). These different relationship conditions may influence the need for pre-marital counseling and how individuals understand their attachment patterns. For example, individuals with high expectations toward their partners, known as excessive relational entitlement, tend to be more sensitive to disappointment and frustration, expecting greater attention and understanding from their partners (Tolmacz and Mikulincer, 2011 in Bar-Kalifa et al., 2016). Moreover, the lack of emotional support, especially for women, can negatively affect relationship quality and psychological well-being (Brock & Lawrence, 2009). Personality factors also play a role in shaping relationship satisfaction. Neuroticism is negatively related to satisfaction, while extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness have positive effects on relationship quality (Karney and Bradbury, 1995 in Weidmann et al., 2017). Furthermore, self-esteem and relationship quality influence each other, showing the importance of psychological and emotional readiness in building stable relationships (Mund et al., 2018). Therefore, studying the link between attachment patterns, relationship conditions, and pre-marital counseling needs among early adults is important both theoretically and practically.

Parental involvement through emotional attention and simple daily interactions, such as loving greetings or warm conversations, helps children develop a sense of security. This foundation carries into adulthood and shapes how individuals form romantic relationships and prepare for marital commitment (Saefudin et al., 2025). This is in line with attachment theory from Bowlby, which emphasizes that the first emotional bond with the primary caregiver plays a crucial role in shaping emotional and social relationships throughout life (Yudha et al., 2024). Attachment is understood as a close emotional relationship between a person and someone who holds special meaning (Ainsworth et al., 1978 in Dimas et al., 2023). Warm, consistent, and loving relationships during childhood contribute to healthy emotional, social, and mental development, while a lack of or separation from the main caregiver can disrupt one's ability to build close relationships later in life (Bowlby, 1952 in Van Der Horst et al., 2024). Furthermore, early experiences with the primary caregiver form what is called working models or internal working models of attachment, which shape emotions, expectations, and close relationship patterns in adulthood (Bowlby, 1982). Basically, Bowlby divided attachment into two types: secure and insecure attachment. Later, Ainsworth expanded the classification of insecure attachment into three types: avoidant, anxious, and disorganized attachment (Hoenicka et al., 2022).

In line with this classification, attachment can be divided into four main styles that describe how a child relates to a caregiver. Secure attachment is shown when a child uses the caregiver as a secure base to explore their environment when calm, and as a haven of safety when anxious, allowing them to return to the caregiver with trust. In contrast, avoidant attachment appears when a child turns away from the caregiver to minimize distress, acting as if rejecting or keeping distance. Anxious or resistant attachment is shown through excessive distress and frustration as a way to get more attention from the caregiver, especially when the caregiver's availability is inconsistent. Meanwhile, disorganized attachment describes a child who shows strange, contradictory, or disoriented behavior in front of the caregiver, reflecting a confusing attachment pattern (Spies & Duschinsky, 2021).

Besides attachment, relationship status also plays an important role in psychological outcomes. Relationship status can be categorized as married, dating, or single, and each condition brings different challenges. Married individuals face long-term adaptation and adjustment to shared life responsibilities, those who are dating negotiate commitment and manage interpersonal challenges, while singles focus on self-preparation, including maintaining psychological well-being and developing skills for future relationships (Dush & Amato, 2005; Lehmann et al., 2015). These differences suggest that relationship status may act as a variable that moderates the link between attachment patterns and the need for pre-marital counseling.

Pre-marital counseling is a psychological and educational service designed to prepare couples with communication skills, understanding of roles, conflict management, and stress management strategies before marriage. This program has been shown to increase marital satisfaction and reduce the risk of divorce. Pre-marital counseling also helps couples manage marital risks by improving communication and conflict resolution skills (Tambling and Glebova, 2013). This supports the idea that the quality of emotional connection between partners is the foundation of marital stability (Umemura et al., 2021). Moreover, communication skills have a strong impact on marital satisfaction, so communication training should be a key part of pre-marital counseling (Parhizgar et al., 2017).

However, not all individuals have the same level of need for counseling. Pre-marital counseling needs depend on one's attachment pattern and relationship condition. Individuals with anxious attachment tend to have higher counseling needs because of their fear of rejection and loss (Romano et al., 2008). On the other hand, those with secure attachment are generally more prepared for marriage because they tend to build longer and more satisfying relationships. Meanwhile, individuals with insecure attachment are more likely to experience emotional distress and have difficulty coping with negative interpersonal events (Margolese et al., 2005). Therefore, intervention through pre-marital guidance or counseling is important to help individuals prepare for a healthy long-term relationship. In this sense, pre-marital counseling needs can be understood as a personal awareness to seek professional support before marriage.

Previous studies have emphasized that attachment patterns play a central role in shaping relationship quality and marital dynamics. In early adulthood, attachment preferences tend to shift from friends to romantic partners (Umemura et al., 2015), and romantic partners even become the most influential attachment figures in career decision-making, surpassing the role of parents or friends (Kvitkovičová et al., 2017). From an early development perspective, insecure attachment in infancy has been linked to emotional problems later in life (Umemura et al., 2021), highlighting the long-term importance of attachment in psychological well-being. On the other hand, pre-marital counseling and communication training have been shown to improve marital satisfaction, communication skills, and couples' psychological well-being (Alipour et al., 2020; Birni & Eryilmaz, 2022; Doss et al., 2020; Fathi et al., 2021). Marital satisfaction has also been found to act as a protective factor against marital burnout (Nejatian et al., 2021).

However, most of these studies focus on career, well-being, or the effectiveness of pre-marital programs outside Indonesia, and few have examined how secure and anxious attachment patterns, combined with relationship status, influence pre-marital counseling needs among early adults. Therefore, this study brings novelty by focusing on the integration of attachment patterns and relationship conditions as predictors of pre-marital counseling needs, especially among early adults in Indonesia.

This study aims to examine the relationship between attachment style, relationship condition, and pre-marital counseling needs among early adults. Focusing on secure, disorganized, anxious, and avoidant attachment patterns, as well as respondents' relationship conditions, the study highlights emotional and social tendencies in interpersonal relationships and their implications for counseling readiness. Understanding these patterns can help counselors design adaptive, psychologically informed interventions. The study posits that most early adults have a need for pre-marital counseling and that attachment style and relationship condition play a significant role in shaping this need.

Method

This study used a descriptive quantitative design to examine attachment patterns, relationship conditions, and pre-marital counseling needs among early adults. A total of 480 respondents aged 18–40 who met the inclusion criteria completed an online questionnaire adapted from the Attachment Styles Questionnaire (Guerrero et al., 2009), and previously tested in Indonesia (Fitriana & Fitria, 2016), ensuring its suitability for the local cultural context.

Participants were selected via random sampling to ensure equal chances of inclusion. The instrument measured secure, anxious, disorganized, and avoidant attachment, relationship conditions, and perceived need for pre-marital counseling. Data were analyzed descriptively (frequency, percentage, mean, median, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum) to summarize demographics, attachment patterns, and relationship conditions. Rare-event logistic regression was performed in Python using `statsmodels.fit_regularized()` to examine associations between attachment styles, relationship conditions, and counseling needs, accounting for the highly unbalanced outcome, with all data processing conducted in Google Colab.

Findings

The purpose of this study's data analysis is to describe the distribution of age, attachment styles, and respondent characteristics, as well as to examine the implications of attachment style and relationship conditions on the need for pre-marital counseling among young adults. In addition, this study uses regression analysis to assess the effect of predictor variables on the probability of needing pre-marital counseling, with a focus on rare-event logistic regression (penalized) because the outcome distribution is very unbalanced.

Rare-event logistic regression (penalized) is used because almost all respondents (99.4%) reported a need for pre-marital counseling, so standard logistic regression may produce biased or non-converging coefficients. The penalized method improves coefficient estimates in rare-event cases by adding a penalty to the likelihood, making the estimates more stable and interpretable. This analysis is conducted using the `statsmodels` library in Python with the `smf.logit()` function and the penalized (rare-event) likelihood optimization approach.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents' Age and Attachment Styles

Variable	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
Age	23.17	21	5.28	18	40
Secure Attachment	3.60	3.60	0.52	1.60	5.00
Disorganized Attachment	3.64	3.67	0.80	1.33	5.00
Anxious Attachment	3.46	3.50	0.73	1.00	5.00
Avoidant Attachment	3.57	3.50	0.63	1.25	5.00
N	480				

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents' age and attachment styles. Respondents' ages range from 18 to 49 years, with a mean of 23.17 and a median of 21, indicating that most are in early adulthood. Attachment style scores show an average secure attachment of 3.60, disorganized attachment 3.64, anxious attachment 3.46, and avoidant attachment 3.57, with standard deviations of 0.52–0.80, indicating moderate variation among respondents. The medians of each attachment style are close to the mean, showing a relatively symmetrical distribution.

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents' Characteristics

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	222	46.2
	Female	258	53.8
Relationship Status	Single	260	54.2
	In a Relationship	154	32.1
	Married	66	13.8
Parental Status	Have Children	54	11.2
	No Children	426	88.8
Relationship Condition	Negative	91	19.0
	Neutral	170	35.4
	Positive	219	45.6
Counseling History	Never	461	96.0
	Ever	19	4.0
Need for Pre-marital Counseling	Not Needed	3	0.6
	Needed	477	99.4

Table 2 shows the distribution of respondent characteristics. There are 53.8% women and 46.2% men, most are single (54.2%), and 88.8% have no children. Most respondents report neutral to positive relationship conditions (35.4% neutral, 45.6% positive), while 19.0% report negative conditions. Most respondents have never attended counseling (96.0%), and almost all reported a need for pre-marital counseling (99.4%), confirming high awareness among young adults about the importance of psychological preparation before marriage.

Table 3. Distribution of Respondents' Characteristics

Variable	Coef	OR (Odds Ratio)
Intercept	0.000	1.00
Challenging Relationship Condition	-1.706	0.18
Supportive Relationship Condition	-1.197	0.30
Secure_Avg	0.601	1.82

Additional descriptive analysis shows that respondents who need counseling have an average Secure_Avg of 3.60 and Insecure_Avg of 3.56, while respondents who do not need counseling have Secure_Avg 3.40 and Insecure_Avg 3.18. This indicates that individuals with higher attachment scores, especially insecure attachment, are more likely to recognize the need for pre-marital counseling. In table 3, The rare-event penalized regression results show that Secure_Avg has a positive effect on counseling needs, with an odds ratio of 1.82. The relationship condition categories show lower odds than the reference category (OR 0.18–0.30), but the effect is relatively small because most respondents already reported a need for counseling

Discussion

This study provides a deeper understanding of attachment styles, relationship conditions, and perceptions of the need for pre-marital counseling among young adults in Indonesia. Respondents showed a variety of attachment styles at a medium level, with secure attachment slightly more common than other styles. The average scores for disorganized, avoidant, and anxious attachment were also at a medium level, indicating that young adults differ in emotional regulation and interpersonal strategies. Median values close to the mean suggest a symmetrical distribution, strengthening the reliability of descriptive conclusions about attachment style prevalence.

Although attachment styles vary, almost all respondents (99.4%) reported needing pre-marital counseling, including those who were already married. Married respondents may seek counseling retrospectively or proactively to strengthen ongoing relationships, improve communication, or prevent future relational problems. This indicates that the perceived value of counseling is not limited to pre-marital preparation alone but also extends to relationship enhancement and maintenance. The high need for counseling highlights widespread recognition among young adults of the importance of psychological and emotional preparation before and during marriage (Asadpour et al., 2025; Dell'Isola et al., 2021).

Demographic characteristics provide additional context. Most participants were single (54.2%) and did not have children (88.8%), reflecting early adulthood, when relationship experiences and long-term planning are key developmental tasks. Most reported neutral to positive relationship conditions (35.4% neutral, 45.6% positive), while 19% experienced challenging relationship conditions, indicating a group that may need more focused counseling interventions, especially in conflict resolution, trust building, and managing relational stress. Interestingly, a subset of married respondents (13.8%) also reported a need for pre-marital counseling, which may reflect their desire for guidance in managing marital adjustment, resolving early relational conflicts, or strengthening long-term relationship skills that were not addressed prior to marriage. From a theoretical perspective, these findings highlight the interaction between attachment styles and readiness for pre-marital counseling. Individuals with secure attachment, who can generally regulate emotions and show confidence in relationships, are likely to benefit more from interventions emphasizing communication, planning, and long-term relationship maintenance. Individuals with anxious or avoidant attachment may need extra support in emotion regulation, managing relational anxiety, and developing trust. Disorganized attachment, often linked to

contradictory behaviors and instability, requires individualized interventions focusing on emotional triggers and stabilizing attachment patterns. By identifying these nuances, this study contributes to literature on adult attachment theory and its application in pre-marital counseling (Konradus et al., 2024; Pramantari & Soetjningsih, 2023).

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Cultural and social factors play an important role in shaping young adults' perceptions of pre-marital counseling. In Indonesia, there is a growing recognition that preparing for marriage goes beyond traditional rituals and legal requirements, emphasizing psychological readiness, communication skills, and emotional awareness. Studies among university students indicate that awareness and attitudes toward pre-marital counseling vary across genders and faculties, with female students generally being more informed and showing more positive attitudes than males (Omi-Ujuanbi & Osumah, 2024; Osman et al., 2021). These findings suggest that counseling programs need to be culturally sensitive while also adaptable to individual needs, helping young adults navigate their expectations, concerns, and relational skills. By integrating local values and norms with universal psychological principles, pre-marital counseling can serve as a preventive and supportive intervention, equipping individuals to manage conflicts, build trust, and enhance mutual understanding in their future marriages. This approach not only fosters readiness but also encourages self-reflection and awareness of personal attachment patterns, ultimately supporting more stable and satisfying long-term relationships.

The data also offer insights into cultural considerations. In Indonesia, pre-marital counseling is increasingly recognized as an important part of marriage preparation, reflecting religious norms and social expectations. High awareness of the need for counseling indicates a cultural shift toward emphasizing psychological readiness alongside traditional preparation. Empirical evidence shows that pre-marital counseling in Indonesia primarily uses group models and targets prospective brides and grooms in early adulthood (ages 18–40), focusing on providing information that enhances knowledge and readiness for marriage (Widodo & Manara, 2024). Practically, this suggests that counseling programs should be culturally sensitive and adaptable while still integrating universal psychological principles. Considering the cultural context and large number of participants, group counseling or group guidance is recommended to maximize reach and encourage peer learning, while individual counseling can be offered for clients requiring personalized attention. Moreover, pre-marital counseling can function as a preventive intervention that strengthens relational skills, such as communication, conflict resolution, and adaptive coping mechanisms, tailored to individuals' attachment styles. It also encourages self-reflection and awareness of relationship patterns, supporting long-term relationship satisfaction and stability. These findings support integrating attachment-based frameworks into pre-marital counseling, where interventions can be tailored to individual attachment

profiles.

Practically, these findings emphasize that pre-marital interventions should be adjusted to each individual's attachment pattern. Individuals with a secure attachment can be focused more on communication skills, planning, and relationship strengthening, while those with an anxious attachment need additional guidance on emotion regulation, strategies for building trust, and readiness to face relationship challenges. Theoretically, this study expands the understanding of the role of attachment styles in shaping readiness for pre-marital counseling, especially among early adults in Indonesia. The limitations of this study include its cross-sectional design, which does not allow for tracking changes in attachment styles and counseling readiness over time; the highly imbalanced distribution of counseling needs; and the use of self-report instruments that may lead to social desirability bias. Future research is recommended to use a longitudinal design, include married couples or individuals with more complex relationship experiences, and develop instruments that can better capture the variation of counseling needs. Additional studies may also include qualitative analysis, such as in-depth interviews, to understand individuals' motivations and perceptions toward pre-marital counseling in a more contextual way. Pre-marital counseling can help couples gradually build stronger relationships by teaching life skills, encouraging them to understand each other's expectations, and guiding them to face marital challenges with greater preparedness and confidence (Asai & Olsno, 2004).

Conclusion

This study reveals that young adults in Indonesia exhibit a variety of attachment styles at moderate levels, with secure attachment slightly more common, and that almost all participants recognize the need for pre-marital counseling. These findings highlight that pre-marital counseling is widely perceived as valuable for both emotional preparation and the enhancement of relational skills, with interventions needing to be tailored according to individual attachment profiles. Practically, the study underscores the importance of culturally sensitive and adaptable counseling programs that address communication, trust building, conflict resolution, and self-reflection, promoting long-term relationship satisfaction and stability. Theoretically, the results contribute to the understanding of how attachment patterns influence readiness for pre-marital counseling among early adults, supporting the integration of attachment-informed frameworks in practice. Limitations of this study include its cross-sectional design, the highly imbalanced distribution of counseling needs, and reliance on self-report measures, which may affect generalizability. Future research is recommended to adopt longitudinal designs, include participants with more varied relationship experiences, and employ mixed-method approaches to capture the motivations and perceptions toward pre-marital counseling more comprehensively.

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