

Peer separation anxiety among final-year university students: a scoping review from Bowlby's attachment theory perspective

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Abstract

The transition from university to post-academic life represents a critical developmental stage that presents significant challenges to the social well-being of final-year students. From a guidance and counselling perspective, anticipated peer separation may lead to emotional distress, a phenomenon that remains underexplored in higher education research. Peer separation anxiety is defined as excessive emotional distress experienced upon actual or anticipated separation from significant peer attachment figures. This construct is distinct from parental separation anxiety and is increasingly recognised during emerging adulthood. Drawing on Attachment Theory, the present study aims to map and synthesise current evidence regarding peer separation anxiety and its psychological implications among university students. A scoping review was conducted following the Arksey and O'Malley framework and PRISMA-ScR guidelines, utilising the Population–Concept–Context (PCC) framework, and included literature published between 2016 and 2026. The search identified 1,640 records across Scopus, PsycINFO, and Web of Science, of which 8 met the inclusion criteria. The findings indicate that separation anxiety is consistently associated with internalising symptoms such as anxiety and depression. Insecure attachment styles and intolerance of uncertainty are identified as key risk factors, whereas peer attachment functions as a protective factor in psychological adjustment. In collectivist cultural contexts, such as Indonesia, where group identity and interdependence are central, peer bonds formed during university acquire heightened psychological significance. The dissolution of these bonds at graduation constitutes both an interpersonal loss and a disruption of collective identity. Notably, although the review focuses on final-year students, most included studies examined the general university student population rather than those specifically at the point of graduation, highlighting a significant conceptual and population gap. Furthermore, no studies from Indonesia were identified, and research employing qualitative or helping relationship-based approaches is lacking. These findings highlight the urgent need for culturally relevant research and the development of localised evaluation tools. Specifically, adapting the ASA-19 for use in Indonesian higher education should be prioritised to enable guidance and counselling professionals to identify and address peer separation anxiety among graduating students effectively..

Keywords: *peer separation anxiety, peer attachment, final-year university students, guidance and counseling; Bowlby's attachment theory*



Introduction

The final year of university is widely regarded as one of the most challenging periods for young adults (Arnett, 2000). During this stage, students encounter the stress associated with thesis writing and the anticipated loss of close friends, who often serve as significant sources of emotional support, identity, and belonging (Yani et al., 2025). To date, no Indonesian study has directly examined peer separation anxiety among university students. Peer separation anxiety refers to experiencing strong emotional distress when separated, or anticipating separation, from important friends. This phenomenon is distinct from parental separation anxiety and is increasingly recognized among young adults (Manicavasagar et al., 2003; Iannattone et al., 2024). Addressing this research gap is the primary motivation for the present study. From a guidance and counselling perspective, this transitional period involves not only changes in relationships but also personal and social development, which can influence students' emotional adjustment as they leave university. Peer separation anxiety may also hinder students' willingness to explore new opportunities. According to Bowlby's (1973) model, activation of the attachment system leads students to prioritize proximity to friends, potentially detracting from the focus required to complete their thesis. For students in their final semesters, peer separation anxiety represents both a social concern and a potential risk to academic performance. In Indonesia, guidance and counselling services address personal, social, academic, and career domains, with the personal-social domain emphasizing emotional well-being, relationships, and adaptation to life changes (ABKIN, 2013; Permendikbud No. 111 Tahun 2014). Despite this comprehensive system, the issue of peer loss at graduation remains underexplored in Indonesian guidance and counselling research. Consequently, university counsellors may encounter students struggling with peer loss but lack appropriate tools or research to facilitate early detection, assessment, or intervention.

John Bowlby's Attachment Theory provides a framework for understanding emotional responses to separation and loss across the lifespan. Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980) posited that disruptions to strong emotional bonds, whether actual or anticipated, activate the attachment system and frequently result in separation anxiety. Although initially centered on child-caregiver relationships, the theory has been extended to friendships during adolescence and young adulthood, where peers offer comfort and security (Allen & Land, 1999; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). In Indonesia, a context characterized by strong collectivist values, university friendships may hold particular significance (Hofstede, 2001). Within such cultures, where group identity and collaboration are highly valued, the loss of friends at graduation constitutes not only a personal loss but also impacts the collective sense of identity (Hofstede, 2001; Wider et al., 2023). However, existing research on this topic remains fragmented and does not comprehensively address the definition, effects, or antecedents of peer separation anxiety among university students. This research gap is significant for both academic inquiry and professional practice, as guidance and counselling professionals are tasked with supporting students' personal and social development but lack sufficient empirical evidence to inform their interventions. The present scoping review synthesizes current knowledge on peer separation anxiety, peer attachment, and student responses to social separation, employing Bowlby's Attachment Theory as an organizing framework. The review specifically considers implications for guidance and counselling in Indonesian universities and addresses the following questions: (1) How is peer separation anxiety conceptualized in the literature, and what psychological effects have been identified? (2) What personal, attachment-related, and contextual factors are associated with peer separation anxiety in university students?

(3) How has research in this area evolved, and what critical gaps remain for guidance and counselling in Indonesia?

Method

A scoping review methodology was employed, utilizing the five-stage framework developed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and subsequently refined by Levac et al. (2010). The review process adhered to PRISMA-ScR guidelines (Tricco et al., 2018). Scoping reviews facilitate the mapping of existing evidence, identification of key concepts, and detection of research gaps, making this approach suitable for the nascent stage of guidance and counselling scholarship. The review protocol was registered with the Open Science Framework (OSF) prior to the commencement of the literature search.

Stage 1: Identifying the Research Question

The central research question for this review is: "How does the literature describe peer separation anxiety and peer attachment among final-year university students from the perspective of Bowlby's Attachment Theory, and what are the implications for guidance and counselling practice?" The review applies the PCC framework, which consists of Population (final-year university students, emerging adults aged 18 to 25), Concept (peer separation anxiety, peer attachment, emotional responses to social separation, Bowlby's attachment theory), and Context (higher education settings, 2016 to 2026, English language). This framework informed all stages of the review process.

Stage 2: Identifying Relevant Studies

We conducted systematic searches in Scopus, PsycINFO (APA PsycNet), and Web of Science Core Collection during March and April 2026. The search strategy was structured around three Boolean blocks in accordance with the PCC framework. For the Population block, we included terms such as "university students," "college students," "final-year students," "graduating students," "undergraduate students," and "emerging adults." The Concept block comprised terms including "peer separation anxiety," "separation anxiety," "peer attachment," "Bowlby," "attachment theory," "attachment style," "anxious attachment," "avoidant attachment," and "secure attachment." The Context block incorporated terms such as "higher education," "university," "academic transition," "graduation transition," and "young adults." These blocks were combined using the Boolean operators AND and OR. Initially, we did not impose a publication date restriction to maximize the number of results. However, the inclusion criteria (see Table 2) specified studies published between 2016 and 2026 to ensure the evidence remained recent and relevant. This approach aligns with standard scoping review methodology, in which a broad search is followed by systematic eligibility filtering (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005).

Table 1. Database Search Strategy and Records Retrieved

No.	Database	Search Strategy	Records
1	Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY: peer/parental attachment AND university/college students AND separation anxiety/Bowlby/attachment theory	1,437
2	PsycINFO (APA)	Thesaurus (DE) + TI/AB: Separation Anxiety + Peer Attachment University/College Students + Bowlby	134
3	Web of Science	TS field: peer separation anxiety OR peer attachment AND university students AND Bowlby/attachment theory	44
4	Other/Manual	Reference searching and additional records	25
TOTAL			1,640

Stage 3: Selecting Relevant Studies

All records were uploaded to Covidence and screened independently by two reviewers. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion or consultation with a third reviewer. Following the removal of 96 duplicates (86 automatically and 10 manually), 1,544 unique records were screened by title and abstract. Thirteen records proceeded to full-text review. Five records were excluded: four due to incorrect outcomes and one due to unavailability of the full text. Eight studies were ultimately included.

Table 2. Eligibility Criteria (PCC Framework)

No.	Dimension	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
1.	Population	Final-year students (semester 6–8) or emerging adults 18–25 in higher education; peer groups as a relevant social unit	High school students, children under 18, or working adults; no specification of academic year
2.	Concept	Peer separation anxiety; peer attachment; emotional response to peer social separation; Bowlby’s Attachment Theory or attachment style (secure/anxious/avoidant/disorganized)	Separation anxiety solely in parent-child contexts; attachment without separation context; non-empirical articles
3.	Context	Higher education setting; Bahasa Indonesia or English; 2016–2026; journals, these reports with empirical data	Non-HE settings; other languages; pre-2016; inaccessible full text

Stages 4 & 5: Mapping and Synthesizing the Data

A standardized charting form was employed for data extraction, capturing author(s), year, country, study design, sample characteristics, mean age, key variables and instruments, theoretical framework, principal findings, emergent themes, documented impacts, and implications for guidance and counselling practice. Data synthesis was conducted using a narrative thematic approach, with findings organized according to the three research questions. The PCC-based concept classification (Direct/Indirect) was utilized to evaluate the degree of conceptual alignment with the core focus of the review.

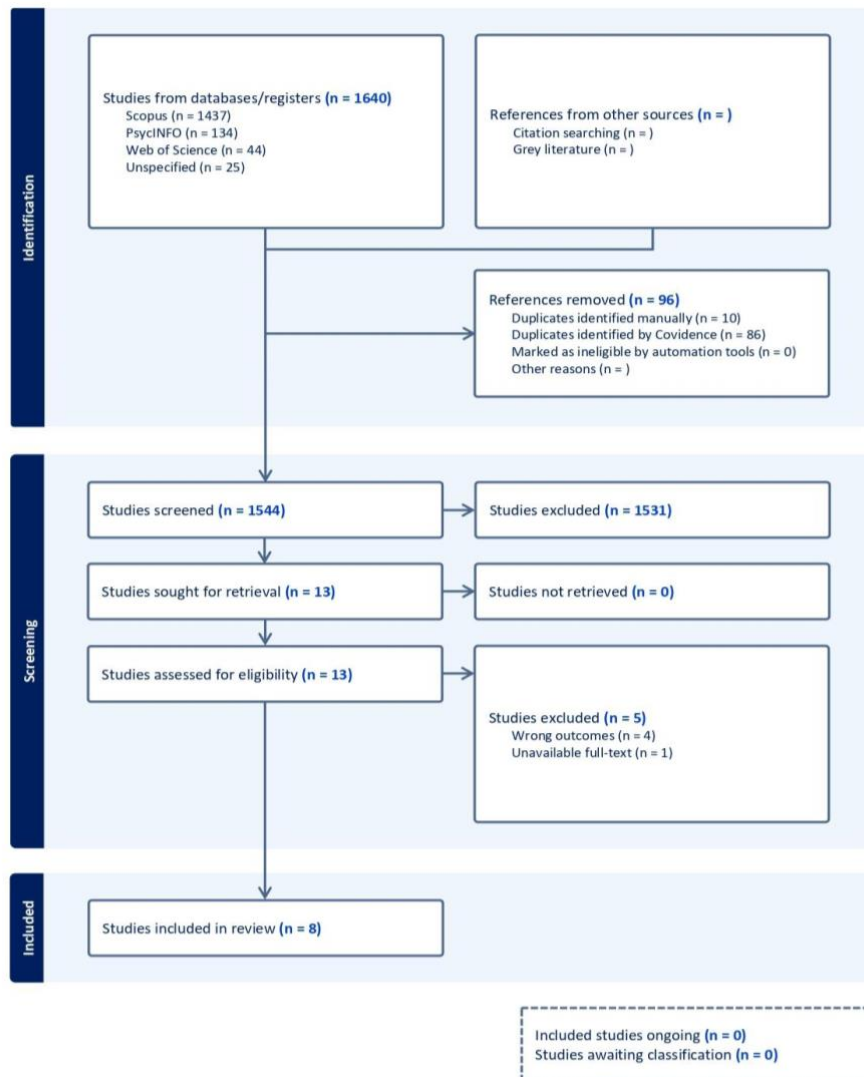


Figure 1. PRISMA-ScR Flow

Findings

Eight studies met the inclusion and eligibility criteria. From 1,640 initial records, 96 duplicates were removed, resulting in 1,544 records for screening. Thirteen articles underwent full review, with five subsequently excluded. Notably, there is limited direct empirical evidence regarding peer separation anxiety during final-year graduation transitions. Only one study (Scharfe, 2017) specifically examined graduating students at the point of academic transition. The remaining studies investigated general university populations, highlighting a significant gap in graduation-specific research. The results are organized into three themes: (1) conceptualizations and psychological effects of peer separation anxiety; (2) associated factors; and (3) the development and current state of research in this field.

Table 3. Characteristics of Included Studies

No.	Author(s),Year	Country	Design	N	Key Findings
1.	Aydogdu, Celik & Eksi (2017)	Turkey	Cross-sectional	331	Separation anxiety negatively predicts self-perception ($\beta=-.131$, $p<.05$); emotional self-efficacy protects resilience ($R^2=.34$)

No.	Author(s),Year	Country	Design	N	Key Findings
2.	Scharfe (2017)	USA/ Canada	Longitudinal cohort (T1–T2)	73	Peer-first network will lead to stable adjustment post-graduation
3.	Mabilia et al. (2019)	Italy	Cross-sectional	379	Internalizing symptoms fully mediate preoccupied attachment. Separation anxiety; $r(\text{Separation anxiety, internalizing})=.66$
4.	Lemos & Jaller (2019)	Colombia	Cross-sectional	98	Separation anxiety = cognitive core of emotional dependency; Separation anxiety causing depression, anxiety, impulsivity pathways
5.	Wider et al. (2023)	Malaysia	Cross-sectional	568	Peer communication as predictor of identity exploration lead to university adjustment; grounded in Bowlby
6.	Topino et al. (2024)	Italy	Cross-sectional	332	Separation anxiety mediates fearful attachment related to love addiction; immature defenses exacerbate Separation anxiety
7.	Iannattone et al. (2024)	Italy	Cross-sectional	868	3 profiles (High/Moderate/Low); 11.1% high-risk co-occurring profile; sought psychological help
8.	Spaggiari et al. (2026)	Italy	Cross-sectional	863	ASA-19: unidimensional, reliable, culturally adapted for emerging adults; Separation anxiety is continuous

Conceptualization of Peer Separation Anxiety

A review of eight studies indicates that separation anxiety exists along a spectrum, bridging clinical diagnoses and normative developmental psychology. Clinically, separation anxiety is classified as a disorder in the DSM; however, from a developmental perspective, it represents a common response to perceived threats to attachment across the lifespan (Bowlby, 1973; Iannattone et al., 2024; Spaggiari et al., 2026). The majority of studies employ the Adult Separation Anxiety Questionnaire (ASA-27) for assessment (Iannattone et al., 2024; Mabilia et al., 2019; Spaggiari et al., 2026). Spaggiari et al. (2026) recently validated the shorter ASA-19 using Item Response Theory, confirming that separation anxiety is a continuous, unidimensional construct. The ASA-19 is recommended for future research in Indonesia. Iannattone et al. (2024) identified three distinct groups: low (~46%), moderate (~43%), and high (11.1%) separation anxiety. Individuals in the high group, characterized by severe anxiety, difficulty tolerating uncertainty, and heightened negative affect, were most likely to have received psychological treatment. These findings suggest that separation anxiety can be clinically significant even outside psychiatric settings. Among university students, adult separation anxiety disorder (ASAD) is associated with insecure attachment and dissociative experiences, with one study reporting a 21% prevalence (Bozkir et al., 2022). Students with ASAD experienced greater difficulty adjusting to university and exhibited higher rates of ambivalent attachment compared to their peers, underscoring attachment insecurity as a key risk factor (Bozkir et al., 2022).

Psychological Impacts Based on Bowlby’s Attachment Theory

Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980) identified three stages in individuals' responses to separation from attachment figures. These stages are also evident when young adults experience separation from peers. In the protest stage, students often attempt to avoid separation by increasing time spent with friends and resisting the prospect of graduation. During the despair stage, students may

withdraw, experience sadness, and focus on the impending loss, which can result in diminished academic engagement and difficulty envisioning life after university. The detachment stage involves adapting to new relationships; however, for students with insecure attachment styles, this adjustment may be challenging and could result in persistent grief or pronounced emotional dependence (Bowlby, 1980). Bowlby's theory further indicates additional psychological effects when peer bonds are disrupted at graduation. These effects are summarized below, with supporting evidence from relevant studies.

Table 4. Psychological Impacts of Peer Separation-Anxiety: Theoretical Predictions and Empirical Evidence

No.	Domain Impact	of Theoretical Prediction (Bowlby)	Evidence from Included Studies
1.	Self-Concept & Identity Development	Disruption of IWMs threatens the 'self as worthy of care' schema when peer attachment figures become unavailable (Bowlby, 1980)	Aydogdu et al. (2017): separation anxiety negatively predicts self-perception ($\beta = -.131, p < .05$). Wider et al. (2023): peer communication quality mediates identity exploration in students ($\beta = .157, p < .05$)
2.	Anxiety Psychological Well-Being	& Activation of the attachment behavioral system produces anxiety; preoccupied styles experience system hyperactivation, resulting in chronic anxiety.	Scharfe (2017): family-first network after graduation \rightarrow more variable anxiety scores (T1–T2). Mabilia et al. (2019): separation anxiety strongly correlated with internalizing symptoms including anxiety ($r = .49, p < .01$)
3.	Depressive Symptoms	Disrupted attachment bonds trigger pathological grief and depression, particularly when separation is involuntary and permanent (Bowlby, 1980).	Scharfe (2017): family-first network leads to more variable depression scores post-graduation. Lemos & Jaller (2019): separation anxiety \rightarrow depression pathway ($\beta = .57, p < .001$ via plan modification coping strategy). Mabilia et al. (2019): Separation anxiety correlated with depressive symptoms as part of internalizing composite ($r = .66$)
4.	Social Functioning New Relationship Formation	& Insecure IWMs carry rejection expectations into new post-graduation contexts, impairing formation of new peer bonds.	Aydogdu et al. (2017): need for approval (a facet of interpersonal sensitivity related to fear of social rejection) negatively predicts resilience ($\beta = -.173, p < .05$). Topino et al. (2024): fearful attachment causing separation anxiety and it's snowballing cause love addiction, suggesting maladaptive relational patterns following anticipated separation
5.	Emotional Regulation Resilience	& Accessible attachment figures serve as external emotion regulators (Bowlby, 1988); their loss leaves students with poor internal regulation without this resource.	Aydogdu et al. (2017): emotional self-efficacy is the strongest protective predictor of resilience ($R^2 = .34$); students lacking emotional self-efficacy are most vulnerable to Separation anxiety's disruptive effects. Iannattone et al. (2024): 11.1% of emerging adults show a high-risk profile co-occurring Separation anxiety, intolerance of uncertainty, and negative affectivity

No.	Domain Impact	of Theoretical Prediction (Bowlby)	Evidence from Included Studies
6.	Academic Performance (Final-Year Specific)	Separation anxiety activates proximity-seeking at the expense of exploratory behavior (Bowlby, 1973), potentially disrupting thesis completion in the final months	No direct evidence from included studies for this specific impact. It identified as a critical research gap for BK scholarship

Bowlby’s theories and empirical findings demonstrate a consistent pattern: peer separation anxiety among final-year students extends beyond a mere social concern. This phenomenon significantly influences self-concept, emotional well-being, depression, and social functioning. For guidance and counseling practitioners, these effects align with the personal-social domain of guidance and counseling services. Consequently, the inclusion of peer separation anxiety in BK assessment and support protocols for university students is warranted.

Factors Associated with Peer Separation Anxiety and Peer Attachment

Personal Factors

Emotional self-efficacy, defined as the belief in one’s ability to manage negative emotions, serves as a significant personal protective factor. Aydogdu et al. (2017) identified ‘using emotions to assist thought’ and ‘understanding emotions’ as the strongest predictors of psychological resilience ($R^2 = .34$) among university students. Conversely, separation anxiety was associated with lower self-perception ($\beta = -.131, p < .05$) according to the interpersonal sensitivity framework (Boyce & Parker, 1989). These findings indicate that students with low emotional self-efficacy are more susceptible to disruptions in self-perception when separated from peers. Intolerance of uncertainty (IU), defined as the tendency to perceive ambiguous situations as threatening, frequently co-occurred with separation anxiety across all three profiles described by Iannattone et al. (2024). This relationship is particularly relevant, as graduation introduces considerable uncertainty regarding students’ future social, professional, and geographic circumstances.

Students who experience difficulty coping with uncertainty are more likely to exhibit heightened separation anxiety as part of their overall psychological distress. Preoccupied (anxious) and fearful attachment styles have been identified as the most prevalent predictors of separation anxiety. Mabilia et al. (2019) reported that preoccupied attachment was a strong predictor of separation anxiety, with this association fully mediated by internalising symptoms ($r = .66$). Topino et al. (2024) demonstrated that fearful attachment contributed to separation anxiety, which subsequently predicted love addiction. These findings suggest that insecure peer attachment may foster unhealthy dependence on relationships following the loss of peers. Scharfe (2017) observed that the organisation of students’ attachment relationships influences their adjustment during graduation. Specifically, students who identified a peer as their primary attachment figure exhibited more stable anxiety, depression, and self-esteem scores compared to those who selected a family member. Wider et al. (2023), building on Bowlby’s theory, further demonstrated that effective peer communication facilitated identity exploration and adjustment to university ($\beta = .157, p < .05$). These results have practical implications for the development of guidance and group counselling programs.

Social-Contextual Factors

Scharfe (2017) reported that 78% of participants relocated to a new city within six months of graduation, and 44% began new employment. Such transitions frequently result in the separation of students from their university peers. The cultural context of these studies is also significant. Four studies conducted in Italy, where adults commonly reside with extended families, indicated that romantic attachment was a stronger predictor of separation anxiety than peer attachment. In

contrast, in Indonesia, where strong peer groups and collectivist social values are emphasized, peer attachment is anticipated to play a more prominent role. Consequently, separation anxiety related to peers may represent a more substantial clinical and developmental concern in Indonesia.

Development of Research on Peer Separation Anxiety: State and Gaps

Existing research in this field is constrained by methodological limitations and a narrow regional focus. The majority of studies employ cross-sectional survey designs, which do not capture longitudinal changes in students as they approach graduation. Notably, half of the reviewed studies originate from Italy, frequently conducted by related research groups. There is a complete absence of studies from Indonesia or Southeast Asia, and none utilize qualitative or mixed-methods approaches. Only Scharfe (2017) satisfies all three PCC criteria by examining graduating students, peer attachment during the transition, and higher education contexts. Consequently, peer separation anxiety among final-year university students remains insufficiently explored. The scarcity of Indonesian research represents a significant gap, both geographically and in terms of cultural relevance. Indonesian university culture is characterized by strong group identity, regional affiliations, and robust peer support, which differ markedly from the European contexts prevalent in existing literature. Therefore, guidance and counselling research in Indonesia should develop an evidence base that incorporates these distinctive cultural factors.

Table 5. PCC Concept Classification of Included Studies

No.	Author, Year	Concept Type	Explanation	Population Match	Full PCC
1.	Aydogdu et al. (2017)	Indirect	Separation anxiety as 1 subscale of IPSM; primary focus is resilience	General university	Partial
2.	Scharfe (2017)	Direct	Peer vs. family attachment during graduation transition	Final-year	Full
3.	Mabilia et al. (2019)	Direct	Separation anxiety as primary dependent variable; attachment predicts Separation anxiety	General university	Partial
4.	Lemos & Jaller (2019)	Indirect	Separation anxiety in emotional dependency; romantic context	General university	Partial
5.	Wider et al. (2023)	Indirect	Peer attachment for first-year entry, not end-of-study exit	First-year	Partial
6.	Topino et al. (2024)	Indirect	Separation anxiety as mediator for love addiction	General university	Partial
7.	Iannattone et al. (2024)	Direct	Separation anxiety as primary construct; person-centered profiling	Emerging adults	Partial
8.	Spaggiari et al. (2026)	Direct	Separation anxiety psychometric validation in emerging adults	Emerging adults	Partial

Discussion

Drawing on Bowlby's Attachment Theory, this scoping review systematically maps the existing literature on peer separation anxiety and peer attachment among university students, with a particular emphasis on practical implications for guidance and counselling in Indonesian higher education. Analysis of eight studies reveals a landscape that is theoretically coherent but empirically underdeveloped. Although the developmental significance of peer separation anxiety is established, there remains a notable gap in research specifically addressing Indonesian final-year students within counselling contexts. Most studies reviewed focus on general student populations rather than graduating seniors, which represents a significant limitation and highlights the urgent need for primary research targeting final-year Indonesian students. Despite this limitation, findings from

general student cohorts provide a theoretical foundation for the present analysis. Bowlby (1973) asserted that the psychological mechanisms underlying separation anxiety—including insecure attachment, protest-driven proximity-seeking, and restricted exploration—persist throughout the university experience and are likely to intensify at graduation, when separation becomes definitive. Of the eight studies reviewed, only Scharfe (2017) examined graduating students during this transitional period. This paucity of research is theoretically significant, as Bowlby (1973) maintained that anticipated or threatened separation activates the attachment system, with graduation representing the most structured and irreversible form of peer separation in emerging adulthood.

Bowlby's (1973) model establishes a direct connection between this phenomenon and academic outcomes. During the anticipated peer-loss phase, the attachment system and the exploratory system are in competition. For senior students, whose primary academic challenge is thesis writing, this conflict suggests that unmanaged peer separation anxiety may directly contribute to delayed graduation, which is a critical key performance indicator in Indonesian universities. This association reframes the issue from a personal-social concern to an urgent institutional priority. Studies on academic stress among thesis-writing students indicate that stress levels increase significantly during the final semesters, and that personality traits such as conscientiousness influence students' ability to manage these pressures (Nurtamami et al., 2023). Peer separation anxiety, in conjunction with these stressors, may represent an underrecognized contributing factor to graduation delays. A principal theoretical finding of this review is that peer separation anxiety in emerging adults should be conceptualized as a continuous, dimensional construct rather than a dichotomous clinical disorder. This conceptualization is consistent with Mikulincer and Shaver's (2016) characterization of adult attachment anxiety as a trait-like dimension within the general population.

Empirical support comes from the IRT-based validation of the ASA-19 (Spaggiari et al., 2026), which shows that separation anxiety scores are distributed along a continuum without a fixed clinical threshold. For university counselling services, this indicates that peer separation anxiety is neither an isolated psychiatric anomaly nor a trivial emotion; rather, it is a widespread developmental challenge requiring proactive, preventative, and developmental counselling interventions. Finally, Bowlby's Internal Working Model (IWM), as the cognitive-affective schema that shapes views of self, attachment figures, and future relationships, serves as the unifying mechanism across these findings (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016). The IWM framework explains the intersection of the six psychological impact domains: impending peer separation degrades self-concept (Aydogdu et al., 2017; Wider et al., 2023), disrupts emotional regulation by removing peer support (Aydogdu et al., 2017), and impairs subsequent social functioning as distorted relational expectations are carried forward (Topino et al., 2024). For practitioners, this convergence implies that counselling interventions are designed to reshape students' IWMs. It helps them develop adaptable frameworks for coping with peer loss and transition, enabling them to address multiple psychological challenges simultaneously.

Implications for Guidance and Counseling Practice in Indonesian Higher Education

The alignment between Bowlby's theoretical model and empirical findings provides a robust foundation for early recommendations in guidance and counselling, particularly within the personal-social domain. These recommendations are informed by the official responsibilities of counsellors in Indonesian higher education, as delineated in ministerial regulations. Permendikbud No. 111 Tahun 2014 tentang Bimbingan dan Konseling pada Pendidikan Dasar dan Pendidikan Menengah stipulates that guidance and counselling services should facilitate student growth and development, including personal and social aspects. Although this regulation primarily targets primary and secondary education, its core principles are also applied in higher education counselling. Furthermore, Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi (Permendikdasmen), which establishes standards for guidance and counselling in both schools and universities, underscores the critical role of counsellors and educational psychologists in supporting

students through significant life transitions, such as the shift from university to post-graduation life. Within this framework, challenges such as peer separation anxiety are explicitly within the scope of counsellors' responsibilities. Therefore, developing guidance and counselling programs that address peer separation anxiety among students nearing graduation is not merely an innovative approach but a fundamental obligation for higher education counsellors under current regulations.

Framing the Implications: From Reactive to Proactive Guidance and Counseling

The alignment between Bowlby's theory and the findings from these studies provides a robust foundation for drawing early conclusions to inform guidance and counselling, particularly within the personal-social domain. These conclusions are influenced by the formal responsibilities of counsellors in Indonesian higher education, as delineated in ministerial regulations. Permendikbud No. 111 Tahun 2014 tentang Bimbingan dan Konseling pada Pendidikan Dasar dan Pendidikan Menengah stipulates that guidance and counselling services should facilitate students' holistic development, including their personal and social growth. Although this regulation primarily targets primary and secondary education, its core principles are also applied within higher education counselling. Furthermore, Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi (Permendikdasmen), which establishes standards for guidance and counselling in schools, underscores the critical role of counsellors and educational psychologists in supporting students through significant life transitions, such as the shift from university to post-graduation life. Within this framework, challenges such as peer separation anxiety fall squarely within the remit of counsellors. The development of guidance and counselling programs addressing peer separation anxiety among students in their final semesters is, therefore, not merely innovative but an essential responsibility for higher education counsellors, as mandated by current regulations.

The Collectivist Dimension: Batch Identity and Group-Level Peer Separation Anxiety

A significant limitation of all eight studies is the omission of the collectivist cultural context that influences how Indonesian university students develop and experience peer attachment. Each study was conducted in cultures that prioritize individualism, where peer attachment is typically conceptualized as a bond between two individuals. In contrast, Indonesian university students frequently establish attachments at the group level, centered on their student cohort or batch as a shared identity. In collectivist societies such as Indonesia, individuals derive much of their identity from group membership, and the bonds formed within university cohorts are highly significant. These relationships extend beyond friendship to encompass shared goals, regional affiliations (*asal daerah*), and a collective academic identity (Hofstede, 2001). Hasani et al. (2025) reported that students residing away from familiar environments and social networks are more likely to experience adult separation anxiety and may resort to internet use as a coping mechanism. These findings indicate that the social transitions associated with graduation may provoke peer separation anxiety in ways not fully captured by Western-based assessment tools. Therefore, guidance and counselling services in Indonesian universities should be prepared to address this specific form of peer separation anxiety. Future research should prioritize the development and validation of peer separation anxiety instruments that incorporate the significance of batch identity, in addition to the individual attachment components measured by the ASA-27/19.

Implications for the Personal Domain of Guidance and Counseling Services Guidance and counselling services that prioritise personal development (ABKIN, 2013) effectively address the adverse effects of peer separation anxiety, including reduced self-esteem (Aydogdu et al., 2017), increased internalising symptoms (Mabilia et al., 2019), and difficulties in establishing a stable identity (Wider et al., 2023). For highly vulnerable students facing separation anxiety, negative emotions, and uncertainty, Iannattone et al. (2024) suggest that attachment theory-based individual counselling is highly recommended. This method enables students to understand the influence of attachment on their behaviour, adapt more readily to changes in relationships, and develop

emotional self-confidence to manage stress. Concurrently, group guidance sessions during the final semester should incorporate instruction on the typical transition from university to employment and on Bowlby's attachment stages. Such content helps students interpret separation anxiety as a normal, biologically based response rather than a personal deficiency. The development of emotion regulation skills should be a central objective in all counselling modalities. Aydogdu et al. (2017) identified emotional self-efficacy as a critical factor in fostering resilience. This finding is consistent with Mikulincer and Shaver's (2016) assertion that secure attachment is defined by robust emotion regulation abilities, rather than merely the absence of emotional distress. Therefore, counsellors are advised to integrate practical skill-building activities within a supportive, attachment-based framework rather than presenting emotional skills as isolated topics.

Implications for the Social Domain of Guidance and Counseling Services

The social dimension examines students' interpersonal interactions, the quality of their relationships, and their ability to navigate social situations (ABKIN, 2013). Three primary strategies can support students in these areas. First, group counselling for students in their seventh and eighth semesters can enhance peer communication skills, such as sharing emotions, attentive listening, and collaborative reflection, as they approach graduation. Wider et al. (2023) found that effective communication within peer groups facilitates self-understanding and adjustment more than trust-building alone. Second, schools can prepare students for anticipated changes in their social networks. Scharfe (2017) reported that nearly 78% of students relocate within six months after graduation; therefore, whelpops can help students evaluate current relationships, decide which to maintain, and plan for new connections. Finally, a peer support program facilitated by counsellors trained in active listening and attachment theory can provide adaptable and scalable assistance. This approach aligns with Indonesia's collectivist culture, where students often prefer engaging with trained peers rather than seeking formal counselling.

The Collectivist Dimension: Batch Identity and Group-Level Peer Separation Anxiety

A significant limitation of all eight studies is the absence of consideration for the collectivist cultural context that influences how Indonesian university students develop and experience peer attachment. These studies exclusively examined individualist cultures, including Italy, Turkey, Colombia, the USA/Canada, and Malaysia, where peer attachment is typically conceptualized as a bond between two individuals. In contrast, peer attachment among Indonesian university students frequently occurs at the group level, centered on the student cohort or batch as a collective identity. Students primarily experience a sense of belonging through their batch rather than through individual friendships. This group-based structure lacks a direct counterpart in Western attachment research. According to Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions framework, Indonesia is characterized as one of the most collectivist cultures globally, distinguished by strong group loyalty, interdependence, and an identity rooted in group membership rather than individual distinction.

Within this cultural context, graduation signifies not only the loss of individual friendships but also the dissolution of a shared identity that has shaped students' social experiences over several years. The group dimension of peer separation anxiety differs from the dyadic attachment issues identified in previous research, and its cognitive and behavioral effects may also diverge. For instance, Bowlby's (1973) protest phase may be expressed through collective activities that reinforce batch cohesion, such as spending increased time together, documenting shared experiences, or delaying post-graduation plans. University guidance and counselling services in Indonesia should be prepared to address this group-based manifestation of peer separation anxiety. Understanding the operation of internal working models (IWMs) in this context can enable counsellors to target students' relational cognitions, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of support. By promoting adaptive perspectives on friendship, loss, and transition, counsellors can assist students in managing multiple challenges concurrently rather than addressing each issue in

isolation. Future research should develop and validate instruments to assess this group-based aspect of peer separation anxiety, supplementing the individual attachment measures currently employed in the ASA-27/19.

The Research-Practice Gap and the Urgency of Indonesian Contextual Evidence

The absence of Indonesian studies in this review underscores a significant gap between research and practice, which may compromise the quality of guidance and counselling services. The eight studies examined consistently identify psychological mechanisms and risk factors for peer separation anxiety; however, all were conducted in contexts where peer relationships, university counselling services, and the experience of emerging adulthood differ markedly from those in Indonesia. Arnett (2000, 2018) observed that, although emerging adulthood is present in many cultures, its characteristics vary across contexts. In collectivist societies, this developmental period may be shorter or less pronounced, with greater emphasis on family responsibilities and distinct functions for peer networks compared to individualist societies. Consequently, findings from Italian or Colombian samples, such as the association between preoccupied attachment and internalising symptoms (Mabilia et al., 2019), or the influence of peer communication on identity exploration (Wider et al., 2023), should not be presumed applicable to Indonesian students without further investigation. Establishing a local evidence base for peer separation anxiety is essential for effective, evidence-based guidance and counselling, rather than merely a matter of national pride or academic thoroughness. The immediate priority is to develop and validate the PSAS-IU, as outlined in the following section. This initiative should be regarded as a critical step toward bridging the gap between international research on peer separation anxiety and the actual experiences of Indonesian final-year students.

Instrument Recommendation: Adapting the ASA-19 for the Indonesian University Context

The ASA-19 (Spaggiari et al., 2026) is recognized as the most advanced and user-friendly instrument for assessing separation anxiety in non-clinical emerging adults. Its straightforward structure, item response theory (IRT) validation, and concise 19-item format make it suitable for screening within university guidance and counselling contexts. However, direct application without cultural adaptation is inadvisable due to significant differences between the original Italian context and the Indonesian university environment. Therefore, an Indonesian version should be developed through a rigorous adaptation study, specifically targeting students in semesters 7 and 8.

Table 7. Recommended Adaptations of ASA-19 for Indonesian University Context (Semester 7–8)

Adaptation Dimension		Rationale	Example Items/Scales to Add
Regional Daerah)	Origin (Asal)	Indonesian university students frequently study far from their home region. The geographical distance from asal daerah compounds peer separation anxiety, as graduation means losing both campus peers AND the social proximity enabled by campus geography	“How far is your home region from your university?” (distance in hours); “How often do you visit your home region during the academic year?”
Family Patterns Keluarga)	Communication (Pola Komunikasi)	In Indonesian collectivist culture, family communication patterns shape students’ internal working models and their capacity to use peers as attachment figures. Students from high-family-communication backgrounds may experience peer separation differently from those whose primary attachment base is peers	Adapted Family Communication Patterns Scale items (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002) measuring conversation orientation and conformity orientation in the family of origin

Adaptation Dimension	Rationale	Example Items/Scales to Add
Collective Identity (Identitas Kolektif Kelompok)	Indonesian peer groups often function as collective units (angkatan/batch identity) rather than dyadic friendships. Separation anxiety may be experienced at the group level ('kehilangan angkatan') rather than or in addition to individual friendship loss	"I feel anxious when I think about my batch (angkatan) dispersing after graduation"; "My batch/group identity is central to who I am as a student"
Economic Dependency Context (Konteks Ekonomi)	Economic pressures such as student loans, family financial obligations, regional employment markets, shape how students experience graduation, potentially intensifying separation anxiety through compounding uncertainty	"I feel uncertain about whether I can maintain important friendships due to economic constraints after graduation"
Semester Focus (Semester 7–8 Specificity)	Peer separation anxiety is expected to be most salient in semesters 7–8 when graduation is proximate. The adapted instrument should include timeline-referenced items capturing the anticipatory phase	All items should be framed: "As you approach the end of your studies..." rather than the general ASA-27/19 framing

The Peer Separation Anxiety Scale for Indonesian University Students (PSAS-IU) should follow standard adaptation steps. These include translating from English to Bahasa Indonesia, back-translating, reviewing with experts in guidance and counselling, and Bowlby's attachment theory, interviewing semester 7–8 students from different regions and institutions, and validating the scale through confirmatory factor analysis, IRT analysis, and convergent validity testing with the IPPA peer attachment subscale. The new dimensions for PSAS-IU, 'Region of Origin' (Asal Daerah) and 'Collective Identity' (Identitas Kolektif Kelompok), are not just extra items for the ASA-19. They change the structure of the concept itself. In Indonesia, peer separation anxiety is influenced by individual friendships, group identity (batch), and cultural and regional background (asal daerah). Consequently, researchers are not merely translating an Italian scale but are also reconstructing the theoretical framework to align with the context of Indonesian university students. The development of this instrument would represent a significant contribution to guidance and counselling measurement research in Indonesia.

Conclusion

This scoping review synthesizes current research on peer separation anxiety and peer attachment among university students, employing Bowlby's Attachment Theory as a conceptual framework. The review examines the relevance of these issues to guidance and counselling within Indonesian higher education. Analysis of eight studies indicates that peer separation anxiety constitutes a significant psychological concern. It is associated with lower self-esteem, increased anxiety and depression, difficulties in emotion regulation, challenges in identity development, and problems with social adjustment. These findings corroborate Bowlby's proposition that separation from significant individuals can activate the attachment system and negatively impact psychological health during young adulthood. Furthermore, the review identifies insecure attachment styles, particularly anxious and fearful types, as primary risk factors for peer separation anxiety. Conversely, effective peer communication, emotional regulation skills, and robust support networks serve as protective factors. The evidence suggests that the prioritization of peer relationships influences students' adjustment to major life transitions, including the shift from university to post-graduation life. Despite these findings, the review identifies substantial gaps in the existing literature. Research on peer separation anxiety among final-year university students is limited, with only one study addressing the transition to graduation. No studies have been conducted in Indonesia or Southeast Asia, and there is a lack of in-depth investigations into

students' personal experiences. Additionally, no empirically tested guidance or counselling programs targeting this issue have been identified. These gaps are particularly significant given the emphasis on group identity in Indonesian culture, where peer relationships strongly influence both individual and collective belonging. Future research should investigate peer separation anxiety among Indonesian final-year students using culturally appropriate methodologies, such as qualitative interviews, longitudinal studies, and intervention research. It is also essential to develop and validate the Peer Separation Anxiety Scale for Indonesian University Students (PSAS-IU), incorporating factors such as batch identity (*identitas angkatan*) and regional belonging (*asal daerah*). These initiatives will contribute to the development of more effective guidance and counselling services, enabling counsellors to better support students during the transition from university to adulthood.

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