

## Adult attachment and self concept

Amie Nursyuhadah Binti Mohammad Zamzur<sup>1</sup>, Fatahyah Yahya<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universiti Malaysia Sarawak

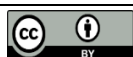
\*Corresponding author, e-mail: [yfatahyah@unimas.my](mailto:yfatahyah@unimas.my)

### Abstract

This study aims to identify the relationship between adult attachment and self-concept among year one and year two counselling students in University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). This research is correlational research design. The sample consisted of 52 respondents. The study involves two main variables of Adult Attachment and Self-Concept. In this study, the questionnaires used are Experience in Close Relationship (ECR) and Robson's Self-Concept Questionnaire (SCQ). Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) analysis showed a negative significant relationship between Attachment Anxiety and Self-Concept with Pearson correlation value ( $p = 0.005$ ,  $r = -0.383$ ). This finding might be due to the respondents' backgrounds which are Counselling students. It is suggested that the trainee counsellors to gain awareness on the importance of having positive self-concept in order to be competence and professional counsellor.

**Keywords:** Attachment avoidance, attachment anxiety, adult attachment, self-concept

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## Introduction

This study highlights on adult attachment and self-concept among year one and year two counselling students in University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). According to Bowlby (1982), "the image of attachment figures is reinforced later in life, sustained and included in one's permanent internal working models regarding oneself and others," (Greszta, Jastrzębski, Izdebski, Kowalska-Dąbrowska, & Januszkiewicz, 2016). "According to this model, an infant's formation of an attachment to a caregiver is a key developmental task that influences not only the child's representations of self and other, but also strategies for processing attachment related thoughts and feelings. Attachment-related events, such as loss and abuse, lead to modifications in these internal representations and affect a child's strategies for processing thoughts and feelings" (Dozier, Stovall-McClough, & Albus, 2008).

There are a lot of demand for counselling services from several sectors such as orphanage house, private sectors, and industrial fields. In October 2017, Datuk Marina Chin announces by Ministry of Youth and Sports Malaysia as person to lead a special force to investigate Malaysian athletes' psychology and sexual harassment. One of the initiatives is to provide counsellors for Malaysian's athletes due to a case exposed this year about a coach raped an athlete in Malaysia, (Khazi, 2017). As for that, prepared and professional counsellors always need to be produced from time to time. Until August 2017, Board of Counsellor in Malaysia stated that there were 7397 counsellor had registered as registered counsellors (Isa, 2017). The preparation for these counsellors should consist in terms of physical, mental and spiritually. This will include the importance of creating, preserving or even changing the self-concept of a counsellor since it will surely leave big impact on the session. According to Hammond and Fletcher (1991), "attachment approach to love and intimate relationships has considerable sweep and power, containing predictions and hypotheses related to many areas including biology, cognition, developmental psychology and social psychology" (Hammond & Fletcher, 1991). Moreover, the professionalism of the counsellor itself will count into the self-concept of a counsellor in a way for it to maintain the professionalism mentioned from the senior counsellors.

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There were quite limited numbers of research particularly in Malaysia that has been focusing on attachment and self-concept. One of the researches was conducted on the relationship between attachment styles and self-concept clarity: the mediation effect of self-esteem (Wu, 2009), using Attachment Scale Taiwan version in measuring respondents' attachment style while Self-Concept Clarity Scale was used in measuring the self-concept. The findings indicated that, 85 out of 189 respondents from National Taiwan University presented both avoidant and anxiety attachment was in high tendency towards unclear self-concept clarity. The research also found that anxiety attachment related with unstable self-esteem while avoidant attachment unrelated with stability self-esteem, (Wu, 2009). On the other hand, another research was conducted about the relationship between the risky sexual behavior practices and attachment styles in using university sample by (Feeney, Peterson, Gallois, & Terry, 2000). The result indicates that avoidant attachment has parallel result with low desire of emotional intimacy and closeness in relationship (Feeney, et al., 2000). Thus, Dozier and Lee (1995), stated that distort self-concept can be seen in avoidant attachment (Wu, 2009).

Even though studies on adolescents have received increasing attention in Malaysia (Ishak, Yunus, & Iskandar, 2010), studies in identifying attachment relationship between adolescents are still lacking, (Wider, Mustapha, Halik, & Bahari, 2017). For example, there was a study conducted by (Wider, et al., 2017), using the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) among 557 fresh graduates from one of government universities in Malaysia. The study was conducted to find out the influenced of individuals' gender and perceived-adult status towards student attachment and adjustment relationships, and the result was showing how trust lead to social adjustment which related to attachment with peers at the universities (showing positive relationship). There was also a study done by (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) towards young adults where one of the aspects explored was self-concept that has been divided into three points which were distress, self-esteem and self-acceptance. The result showed that pre-occupied people were highly dependent on other in maintaining positive self-regard when they used Self-Report Self-Concept Measures and Self-and Friend-Report (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

Thus, this study aims to analyze the relationship between adult attachment and self-concept among Year 1 and Year 2 trainee counsellors in UNIMAS. From this study, a lot of parties may receive such benefits. For example, counselling educators, as it may help them in constructing better plan and strategies in handling the trainee counsellors in prepare them in turning or maintaining the positive and strong self-concept. A strong and positive self-concept is one of the needs in professional counsellors. Maintaining good level of professionalism in counsellors is not an easy work to be done and it is hoped that this study may lessen the gap in achieving the standard. Then, trainee counsellors themselves may gain better awareness about how important of having positive self-esteem as the opposite one will left bad implications towards themselves especially life and career. Not only that, clients can get affected by the counsellor whenever they seek and consult with the unprepared counsellor. Awareness on the self-concept and adult attachment can be highlighted so that those trainee counsellors with negative self-esteem can help themselves to improve better before help others.

## Method

This research will adopt a correlational research design as a researcher wants to measure the relationship between the variables; attachment and self-concept. The independent variable will have two, which are attachment avoidant and attachment anxiety while self-concept is the dependent variable. Through this study, researcher use quantitative research method specifically using questionnaire in survey. Main sampling type that researcher will use is random sampling, specifically on the purposive sampling. Population chosen is the counselling students in UNIMAS, and the sample turned to be the Year 1 and 2 Counselling students. The questionnaires distributed will collect data for study on relationship between attachments with self-concept. The total of participant shall be at least 100 students of the first two years of Counselling.

For Robson self-concept questionnaire, a back to back translation had been done by two appointed expert panels. Each expert was provided with the questionnaire that being translated for the review and feedback. The validity was confirmed using concurrent validity. After being validated, full sets of questionnaires containing all the three part were distributed towards 40 Human Resources and Development students in UNIMAS for pilot study. After gathered the questionnaires, the results are being administered using SPSS. Table 4 and Table 5 below showing the reliability of both ECR and Robson self-concept questionnaire. Pearson correlation coefficient is chosen as the analysis method from the Statistical

Package Social Sciences (SPSS) after the data being collected. The nearer the value of 'r' towards 1 indicates stronger relationship between independent and independent variable.

## Results and Discussion

The following will be presented research results.

**Table 1. The Descriptive Statistics for All Variables**

Variable	n	Mean	Std. Deviation
ECR_AVOIDANT	52	66.6923	11.39752
ECR_ANXIETY	52	73.1538	15.77586
LQB_COMPUTE	52	86.1538	7.82000

Based on Table 1 pearson correlation is used in examining the significant relationship of attachment avoidant on self-concept and attachment anxiety on self-concept. It was hypothesised that there is no significant relationship between the Attachment Anxiety and self-concept. The result showed that there is no significant relationship between attachment avoidance and self-concept ( $p = 0.118$ ,  $r = -0.220$ ).

**Table 2. Attachment Avoidance and Self-Concept**

Variable	n	Pearson Correlation, $r$	Significant Value, $p$
ECR Avoidance	52	-0.220	0.118

The Table 2 shows that result is inconsistent with the previous research conducted by Krstić (Krstić, Otković, Kosiński, & Wojcik, 2016) entitled Attachment to Parents and Friends as a Context for Development of Self-Concept in Adolescence: The Personality Traits as Mediators. In the previous research, the result showed that there was a correlation, weak between attachment anxiety and self-concept. This could be because of the respondents that well developed and prepared enough. As the respondents background are Counselling Program in UNIMAS, subjects like personality development and human development psychology had helped their self-concept to be more rigid and not easily influenced by anything including their attachment style. Their present self-concept might be shaped during their childhood experienced or their parents' thoughts since a person's first life learning was in home where the teachers were their parents. Their previous experiences and upbringing can be the reasons of having certain self-concept.

It was hypothesized there is no significant relationship between the Attachment Anxiety and self-concept. The result showed that there is negative significant relationship between attachment anxiety and self-concept ( $p = 0.005$ ,  $r = -0.383$ ).

**Table 3. Attachment Anxiety and Self-Concept**

Variable	n	Pearson Correlation, $r$	Significant Value, $p$
ECR Anxiety	52	-0.383	0.005

Based on the Table 3 this result gained, is consistent with previous research conducted by Krstić (Krstić, et al., 2016), reported that there was a weak correlation between attachment avoidant with self-concept. This might be due to the respondents' backgrounds which are Counselling students and at the same time, they are still human being. It probably due to the personality of an avoidant person which usually will avoid problem, instead of solving it while at the same time, person with negative self-concept will viewing him or herself as well as the clients negatively. Seeing others and own self as bad will produce bad decision making which is not good as a counsellor which meant to help others in deciding matters.

Attachment theory has been cited extensively to explain individual differences both in infant development and inadult personality. Research in the last three decades has examined indepth how adult attachment styles are related to psychological functioning in terms of emotional experiences, self-regulation of emotionsand stress, self-esteem, and interpersonal relationships. However, less attention has been given to how the attachment and exploration behavioral systems are interrelated. In the current study, I follow researchers who have dealt with the relations between these two behavioral systems (Duchesne & Larose, 2007).

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The development of self-concept has been conceptually linked to both attachment and academic motivation. Bowlby (Bowlby, 1973) theorized that cognitive representations of the self and the social world, i.e., “internal working models,” were important intervening variables between the attachment experience and later behavior. An internal working model can be defined as a set of rules for the organization of information relevant to attachment, and to attachment related experiences, feelings, and thoughts. Several researchers have found positive associations between the quality of internal working models and the quality of self-concept in children and adolescents (Learner & Kruger, 1997).

## Conclusion

The main objectives of this research are to study the relationship between adult attachment and self-concept among year 1 and year 1 counselling students, UNIMAS. In this research, all 52 respondents were chosen among Year 1 and Year 2 of counselling students where, two instruments which are Experience in Close Relationship (ECR) by John Bowlby 1982 and Robson’s Self-Concept (RSC) to test both independent and dependent variables. Demographics of the respondents also been taken in the first part (Part A) of the questionnaire set. Both instrument being back to back translated and validate by two experts in UNIMAS. Pilot test also being conducted before the real data for the research are gathered in order to test the reliability of the full version of the questionnaire which contained of the demographics, ECR and RSC. Data obtained for the real data collection being analyzed using Social Sciences Packages Statistical (SPSS), specifically using Pearson Correlation. The results turn to be that there is negatively significant relationship between Attachment Anxiety and Self Concept among Year 1 and Year 2 Counselling Program in UNIMAS indicates that the first null hypothesis being accepted while the second one being rejected.

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