

# Examining the relationship between attachment styles and levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among young adults

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE



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## ABSTRACT

Attachment styles are fundamental patterns that develop from infancy and influence individuals' interpersonal relationships, emotion regulation processes, and psychological adjustment throughout their lives. Particularly among university-aged young adults, attachment styles are considered to be closely associated with processes such as gaining autonomy, future planning, forming romantic relationships, and coping with stress. The aim of this study is to examine the relationships between attachment styles and levels of depression, anxiety, and stress in young adults. The study was conducted using a correlational survey model, one of the quantitative research methods. The study group consisted of 488 young adults aged between 18 and 24 years. Data were collected using the Personal Information Form, the Relationships Scales Questionnaire, and the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales-21 (DASS-21). In data analysis, independent samples t-tests, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), correlation, and regression analyses were applied, and the analyses were conducted using the JAMOVİ program. According to the findings of the study, levels of depression, anxiety, and stress did not differ significantly by gender or relationship status. In contrast, perceived parental attitudes were found to show a significant difference in levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. Pearson correlation and regression analyses revealed significant positive relationships between attachment styles and levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, and showed that insecure attachment styles significantly predicted the total scores of depressions, anxiety, and stress. In addition, in the distribution of attachment styles by according to gender and relationship status, dismissing and fearful attachment styles were found to be prominent. The findings indicate that attachment styles and parental attitudes play an important role in the mental health of young adults and point to the importance of preventive and developmental psychosocial interventions in this field.

## Cite this as

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Human development is a multidimensional process shaped through interpersonal relationships beginning in the prenatal period. In particular, relationships established with early caregivers significantly influence individuals' perceptions of emotional security, ways of coping with stress, and psychosocial adjustment in later years. In this context, attachment is defined as a persistent emotional bond that develops between an infant and the mother or a primary caregiver, characterized by the search for emotional closeness, the need for security, and becoming especially evident in stressful situations (Sümer & Güngör, 1999). It is stated that this relationship patterns formed in early childhood are not limited to childhood experiences alone; rather, they also play a role in processes such as gaining autonomy, establishing close relationships, and coping with psychological difficulties during the university years and young adulthood. Young adulthood is considered a risky developmental stage for mental health due to academic demands, identity development, and transformations experienced in social relationships; in this period, depending on the quality of early relational experiences, individuals may be more vulnerable or more resilient to negative affective states such as depression, anxiety, and stress (Arslan, 2016; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

The quality of the relationship established with the primary caregiver in early childhood lays the groundwork for the development of different attachment patterns through individuals' perceptions of their emotional needs and the responses given to these needs. While sensitive; consistent, and supportive responses from the caregiver foster the development of a sense of security, inconsistent, distant, or inadequate responses may lead to the emergence of insecure attachment patterns (Sümer & Güngör, 1999). Bowlby (1982) states that these attachment patterns developed in early life leave lasting effects on individuals' ways of coping with stress and their capacity for emotion regulation. Indeed, it is emphasized that attachment styles shaped during childhood are not limited to early developmental periods; rather, they influence interpersonal relationships, psychological adjustment, and mental health across the lifespan (Rees, 2005). These effects become more pronounced during the university years and young adulthood with increasing academic demands, the process of gaining independence, and changes in social relationships, making the relationship between attachment patterns and psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, and stress more visible.

The university years and young adulthood constitute a critical developmental stage in which individuals become relatively independent from their families, establish new social relationships, and encounter academic and professional responsibilities. Considering the proportion of the young population within the total population in Türkiye, the importance of psychosocial processes during this period becomes even more evident. According to the 2022 data of the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), the population aged between 15 and 24 accounts for 15.2% of the total population (tuik.gov.tr). During this period, young people may face multidimensional sources of stress, such as adapting to new social environments, expectations of academic success, and future planning. It is stated that these psychosocial challenges associated with university life may affect individuals' mental health through interaction with attachment patterns developed in early childhood and may play a determining role particularly in levels of depression, anxiety, and stress.

One of the primary mental health problem areas that stands out during young adulthood is depression. Depression is defined as a mood disorder that negatively affects individuals' mood, thought processes, and interpersonal functioning and is characterized by symptoms such as loss of interest, anhedonia, intense sadness, and inability to derive pleasure from life (Johnson & Indvik, 1997; National Institute of Mental Health, 2007, as cited in Yılmaz et al., 2017). Increasing academic expectations, requirements for social adjustment, and concerns about the future during the university years may make young people more susceptible to depressive symptoms. In addition, it is emphasized that not only current stressors but also experiences of neglect, abuse, or insecure

attachment in early childhood play a determining role in the emergence of depression (Bowlby, 1982; Ainsworth, 1978). In this context, attachment patterns developed in early life are considered to function as important risk or protective factors in the emergence of depressive symptoms in young adulthood.

Epidemiological studies conducted in recent years clearly demonstrate the global prevalence of depression and its burden on mental health. According to reports published by the World Health Organization (WHO), depression is one of the most common psychiatric disorders worldwide and can affect individuals across all age groups (WHO, 2021). However, it has been reported that the prevalence of depression becomes particularly pronounced during young adulthood and is more frequently observed among female individuals in this period. The increase in the prevalence of depression alongside rising academic, social, and personal expectations in young adulthood indicates that this period constitutes a critical risk stage for mental health. These findings suggest that depression in young people should be considered not merely an individual problem but a mental health issue closely linked to developmental and relational processes.

Studies in the literature examining the relationship between levels of depression and attachment styles reveal that insecure attachment patterns are significantly associated with depressive symptoms. In particular, individuals with avoidant and dismissing attachment styles are reported to exhibit higher levels of depression compared to individuals with secure attachment styles (İmert, 2018). It is emphasized that this situation may be related to negative self-perceptions and difficulties in emotion regulation that develop due to the inability to obtain sufficient emotional support and a sense of security from caregivers during childhood. Similarly, studies conducted with university students have identified significant relationships between avoidant and dismissing attachment styles and levels of depression (Usta, 2018). These findings indicate that attachment patterns should be considered important risk or protective factors for depression during young adulthood.

Stress is another important psychological process that is frequently encountered during young adulthood and directly affects mental health. Stress is defined as the set of emotional, cognitive, and physiological responses that individuals give to internal or environmental demands that challenge their coping resources (Selye, 1936; Yıldırım, 1991). Increasing academic responsibilities, social expectations, and concerns about the future during the university years are among the main factors that raise stress levels in young people. In addition, it is stated that individuals' ways of coping with stress are closely related to attachment patterns developed in early childhood. Secure attachment patterns are reported to play a protective role in coping with stress, whereas insecure attachment styles are suggested to pave the way for increased stress levels and the use of ineffective coping strategies (Yılmaz *et al.*, 2017). Within this framework, attachment styles are considered an important psychosocial variable in determining stress levels during young adulthood.

Especially in recent years, as stressful situations have been increasingly encountered, this mood-related condition is thought to have become a part of contemporary life. Stress can be defined in psychology as a condition that requires the individual to cope with and overcome it. Selye (1936) states that stress is the body's response to a process of change that requires emotional, physical, and cognitive adaptation. The common point emphasized in these definitions is that stress is an individual experience arising from expectations, pressure, or threat, and that it negatively affects the individual's perception of their own competence or ability to cope (Yılmaz *et al.*, 2017). As perceived, stress can also be expressed as a condition that emerges when the psychological and physical limits of the organism are challenged and threatened (Yıldırım, 1991). In this context, attachment styles are effective on stress levels among young people. Attachment styles vary from individual to individual and play a role in the emergence of stress.

There are numerous studies in the literature addressing the relationships between attachment styles and depression, anxiety, and stress. A substantial portion of these studies have examined these psychological variables independently and have generally evaluated the effects of attachment patterns on mental health

through single outcome variables (Abdullayev, 2019; Güngörmüş, 2021; Karlioğlu & Parlar, 2020). However, it is observed that studies addressing the relationships between attachment styles and depression, anxiety, and stress—which are frequently experienced together during young adulthood—within a holistic framework are limited. In particular, there is a notable need for research examining the simultaneous relationships between attachment patterns and multiple mental health indicators among university-aged young people. In this context, studies revealing the multidimensional effects of attachment styles on young people's psychological well-being are considered to make important contributions to the literature.

The aim of this study is to examine the relationships between attachment styles and levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among young adults. In the study, the role of attachment styles on young people's mental health indicators was addressed using a holistic approach, and the variables of depression, anxiety, and stress were evaluated together. In addition, the roles of demographic variables such as relationship status, perceived parental attitudes, and gender in the context of the relationships between attachment styles and mental health indicators were examined.

In line with the main purpose of the study, the following sub-objectives were determined:

How does the distribution of attachment styles among young adults differ according to gender?

1. How does the distribution of attachment styles among young adults differ according to relationship status?
2. Do young adults' levels of depression, anxiety, and stress show significant differences according to gender?
3. Do young adults' levels of depression, anxiety, and stress show significant differences according to relationship status?
4. Do young adults' levels of depression, anxiety, and stress show significant differences according to perceived parental attitudes?
5. Is there a significant relationship between attachment styles and levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among young adults?
6. Do attachment styles significantly predict the total scores of depression, anxiety, and stress (DAS) among young adults?

## 2 METHODOLOGY

A general survey model was used in the study. The general survey model is also referred to as the correlational survey model. It is defined as a survey approach that aims to determine the existence of co-variation between two or more variables. In the correlational (relational) survey model, it is examined whether variables change together and, if so, how this change occurs, and this relationship is identified and described (Karasar, 2011). In this study, attachment styles constitute the dependent variable, while the independent variables consist of levels of depression, anxiety, stress, gender, relationship status, and parental attitudes.

### 2.1 Study Group

The study group of this research consisted of 488 participants aged between 18 and 24 years, of whom 368 were female and 120 were male (mean age of participants:  $M = 20.06$ ,  $SD = 1.81$ ).

### 2.2 Data Collection Instruments

#### 2.2.1 Personal Information Form

The *Personal Information Form* consists of questions regarding the gender, age, relationship status, and perceived

parental attitudes of the participants who took part in the survey related to the subject. In addition, importance was given to the confidentiality of participants' personal information, and no names of participants were included in the study.

### **2.2.2 Relationships Scales Questionnaire (RSQ)**

The Relationships Scales Questionnaire (RSQ), developed by Griffin and Bartholomew (1994), consists of 30 items and aims to measure four attachment prototypes by summing different items. The RSQ was constructed using paragraphs from Hazan and Shaver's (1987) attachment measure, items from Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) Relationship Questionnaire, and items from Collins and Read's (1990) Adult Attachment Scale. Participants rated the extent to which each item described themselves and their general attitudes in close relationships on a 7-point scale (1 = does not describe me at all; 7 = describes me completely). Secure and dismissing attachment styles are measured with five items each, whereas preoccupied and fearful attachment styles are measured with four items each. Continuous scores reflecting the four attachment styles are obtained by summing the items intended to measure each style and dividing this total by the number of items in each subscale. Accordingly, scores obtained from the subscales range between 1 and 7. These continuous scores are also used to classify participants into attachment styles. In the classification process, each participant is assigned to the attachment category for which they have the highest score.

### **2.2.3 Depression Anxiety Stress Scales-21 (DASS-21)**

The DASS-21 was adapted into Turkish by Yılmaz, Boz, and Arslan (2017) based on the studies of Henry and Crawford (2005) and Mahmoud et al. (2012). The scale consists of a total of 21 items, with three subdimensions — depression, stress, and anxiety — each comprising seven items. The validity of the scale was examined using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). According to the fit indices obtained from the CFA, the values of  $\chi^2/df = 2.8$ ; Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = .99; Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) = .98; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .05; Root Mean Square Residual (RMR) = .05; and Normed Fit Index (NFI) = .98 indicate good fit. The factor loadings of the items in the stress subdimension ranged between .57 and .72 as a result of the CFA. The reliability of the scale was examined by testing Cronbach's alpha coefficients. In the analysis, the alpha value for the stress subdimension was found to be  $\alpha = .755$  (the other subdimensions were Depression  $\alpha = .819$  and Anxiety  $\alpha = .808$ ).

## **2.3 Data Analysis**

In this study, an independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether the dependent variable, attachment styles, differed according to gender. In questions with more than two response options, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine the independent variables. The relationships between the dependent variable, attachment styles, and the independent variables, depression, anxiety, and stress, were examined using Pearson correlation analysis. Regression analysis was applied to determine the predictive effects of the variables. In addition, Tukey's post hoc test was used to identify the source of significant differences between groups. Crosstab analysis was employed to determine the distribution of attachment styles according to relationship status, which is a categorical variable. Statistical analyses of the data were conducted using the Jamovi program.

## **3 FINDINGS**

In this section, the findings obtained from the statistical analyses conducted to reveal the relationships between attachment styles and levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among young adults are presented. The findings are first presented with descriptive statistics regarding the distribution of attachment styles according to gender and relationship status; subsequently, whether levels of depression, anxiety, and stress differ according to

various demographic variables is examined through comparative analyses. Finally, the relationships between attachment styles and mental health indicators are evaluated through correlation and regression analyses, and the predictive role of attachment styles is addressed.

TABLE 1  
*Distribution of attachment styles by gender*

Gender	Secure	Dismissing	Fearful	Preoccupied	Unknown	Total
Female (f)	62	117	111	51	27	368
Row %	16.8	31.8	30.2	13.9	7.3	100
Male (f)	36	33	25	16	10	120
Row %	30.0	27.5	20.8	13.3	8.3	100
Total (f)	98	150	136	67	37	488

Descriptive statistics regarding the distribution of attachment styles by gender among young adults are presented in Table 1. Examination of the findings indicates that female participants most frequently exhibited a dismissing attachment style (31.8%), followed by a fearful attachment style (30.2%). Among male participants, the most prevalent attachment style was secure attachment (30.0%), with dismissing attachment ranking second (27.5%). In both gender groups, preoccupied and unknown attachment styles were observed at relatively lower rates. When the total sample is considered, dismissing attachment (30.7%) and fearful attachment (27.9%) were found to be the most prevalent attachment styles.

TABLE 2  
*Distribution of attachment styles by relationship status*

Relationship Status	Secure	Dismissing	Fearful	Preoccupied	Unknown	Total
No relationship	68(20.7%)	94 (28.7%)	99(30.2%)	44 (13.4%)	23 (7.0%)	328
Dating	26(19.1%)	45 (33.1%)	34(25.0%)	19 (14.0%)	12 (8.8%)	136
Engaged	3(17.6%)	8 (47.1%)	2 (11.8%)	3 (17.6%)	1 (5.9%)	17
Married	1(14.3%)	3 (42.9%)	1 (14.3%)	1 (14.3%)	1 (14.3%)	7

Descriptive findings regarding the distribution of attachment styles according to relationship status among young adults are presented in Table 2. Examination of the findings shows that among young adults who are not in a relationship, the highest proportion corresponds to the fearful attachment style (30.2%), followed by the dismissing attachment style (28.7%). Among young adults who are dating, the most prevalent attachment style was dismissing attachment (33.1%), with fearful attachment ranking second (25.0%). Among engaged participants, dismissing attachment was found to be particularly prominent (47.1%). Similarly, among married individuals, the highest proportion was observed for the dismissing attachment style (42.9%). When all relationship status groups are evaluated together, the distribution of attachment styles is seen to vary across different relationship statuses.

**TABLE 3***Independent samples t-test results of DAS and its subdimensions by gender*

Variable	Gender	N	Mean (X)	SD	t	p
Depression	Female	368	6.46	4.50	-0.08	.936
	Male	120	6.50	4.41		
Anxiety	Female	368	6.58	4.08	1.54	.124
	Male	119	5.92	4.16		
Stress	Female	368	8.03	4.12	1.28	.569
	Male	120	7.46	4.50		
DAS Total	Female	368	21.07	11.23	0.92	.356
	Male	119	19.97	11.73		

Table 3 presents the results of independent samples t-tests comparing young adults' depression, anxiety, stress, and total DAS scores by gender. According to the analysis results, no statistically significant difference was found between female and male participants in terms of depression levels,  $t(486) = -0.08$ ,  $p = .936$ . Similarly, no significant difference was observed between genders with respect to anxiety levels,  $t(485) = 1.54$ ,  $p = .124$ . When stress levels were compared, it was found that there was no significant difference between female and male participants,  $t(486) = 1.28$ ,  $p = .569$ . In addition, no statistically significant difference was found between genders in terms of the total depression, anxiety, and stress (DAS) score,  $t(485) = 0.92$ ,  $p = .356$ . These findings indicate that young adults' levels of depression, anxiety, and stress do not differ significantly according to gender.

**TABLE 4***ANOVA results of DAS total scores by relationship status*

Relationship Status	N	Mean (X)	SD	F	p
No relationship	328	20.7	11.42	0.05	.984
Dating	135	21.1	11.39		
Engaged	17	20.8	11.32		
Married	7	20.3	9.84		

Table 4 presents the results of a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) conducted to examine whether young adults' total depression, anxiety, and stress (DAS) scores differ according to relationship status. According to the analysis results, no statistically significant difference was found in DAS total scores across relationship status groups,  $F(3, 483) = 0.05$ ,  $p = .984$ . The mean DAS total score was calculated as 20.7 for young adults with no relationship, 21.1 for those who were dating, 20.8 for engaged participants, and 20.3 for married participants. These findings indicate that young adults' levels of depression, anxiety, and stress do not differ significantly according to relationship status.

**TABLE 5***ANOVA and Tukey results of DAS total scores by parental attitudes*

Parental Attitude	N	Mean (X)	SD	F	p	Tukey (Significant Difference)
Authoritarian	70	24.3	11.4	6.66	<.001	Authoritarian > Democratic
Democratic	161	18.1	10.7			Democratic < Inconsistent
Neglectful	8	27.3	12.2			—
Protective	220	20.6	11.1			Protective < Inconsistent
Inconsistent	26	27.3	11.3			—

Table 5 presents the results of the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Tukey multiple comparison test conducted to determine whether young adults' total depression, anxiety, and stress (DAS) scores differ

according to perceived parental attitudes. The ANOVA results indicate that DAS total scores differ significantly according to perceived parental attitudes,  $F(4, 483) = 6.66, p < .001$ . Examination of the descriptive statistics shows that the highest mean DAS total scores were observed among young adults who perceived their parents as neglectful ( $\bar{X} = 27.3$ ) and inconsistent ( $\bar{X} = 27.3$ ), whereas the lowest mean score was found among those who perceived their parents as democratic ( $\bar{X} = 18.1$ ). According to the results of the Tukey post hoc analysis, the DAS total scores of young adults with authoritarian parental attitudes were significantly higher than those of young adults with democratic parental attitudes ( $p < .001$ ). In addition, significant differences were found between democratic and inconsistent parental attitudes ( $p < .001$ ) and between protective and inconsistent parental attitudes ( $p = .031$ ). These findings indicate that perceived parental attitude is a distinguishing variable in young adults' levels of depression, anxiety, and stress.

TABLE 6

*Correlation matrix among variables*

Variable	Attachment	Depression	Anxiety	Stress	DAS
Attachment	1				
Depression	.224***	1			
Anxiety	.236***	.629***	1		
Stress	.247***	.674***	.705***	1	
DAS	.256***	.871***	.873***	.894***	1

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 6 presents the results of the Pearson product-moment correlation analysis conducted to examine the relationships between young adults' attachment styles and their levels of depression, anxiety, stress, and total DAS scores. According to the results, attachment styles were found to be positively and statistically significantly associated with depression ( $r = .224, p < .001$ ), anxiety ( $r = .236, p < .001$ ), stress ( $r = .247, p < .001$ ), and total DAS scores ( $r = .256, p < .001$ ). In addition, strong positive relationships were identified between depression and anxiety ( $r = .629, p < .001$ ), depression and stress ( $r = .674, p < .001$ ), and anxiety and stress ( $r = .705, p < .001$ ). The total DAS score was found to show very strong positive relationships with depression ( $r = .871, p < .001$ ), anxiety ( $r = .873, p < .001$ ), and stress ( $r = .894, p < .001$ ). These findings indicate that attachment styles are associated with mental health indicators among young adults.

TABLE 7

*Regression Analysis of Attachment Styles Predicting DAS Total Scores*

Variable	B	95% CI	t	p
Constant	14.84	[12.68–16.99]	13.53	< .001
Dismissing	5.14	[2.37–7.90]	3.65	< .001
Fearful	9.50	[6.68–12.32]	6.62	< .001
Preoccupied	10.05	[6.67–13.42]	5.86	< .001
Unknown	4.60	[0.50–8.70]	2.20	.028

$R = .320, R^2 = .103, F(4, 482) = 13.8, p < .001$

Table 7 presents the results of the multiple linear regression analysis conducted to examine the predictive role of attachment styles on young adults' total depression, anxiety, and stress (DAS) scores. According to the analysis results, the regression model was found to be statistically significant,  $F(4, 482) = 13.8, p < .001$ . Examination of the explanatory power of the model revealed that attachment styles explained approximately 10% of the variance in DAS total scores ( $R = .320, R^2 = .103$ ). Taking secure attachment as the reference category, dismissing ( $B = 5.14, 95\% \text{ CI } [2.37, 7.90], p < .001$ ), fearful ( $B = 9.50, 95\% \text{ CI } [6.68, 12.32], p < .001$ ), preoccupied ( $B = 10.05, 95\% \text{ CI } [6.67, 13.42], p < .001$ ), and unknown ( $B = 4.60, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.50, 8.70], p = .028$ ) attachment styles were



found to significantly and positively predict DAS total scores. These findings indicate that, compared to secure attachment, insecure attachment patterns are associated with higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among young adults.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to examine the relationships between attachment styles and levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among young adults. The findings obtained from the study revealed that attachment styles have a significant and predictive role in young people's mental health indicators. In particular, individuals with insecure attachment patterns were found to experience higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress compared to those with secure attachment styles.

According to the findings of the study, young adults with dismissing, fearful, and preoccupied attachment styles exhibited significantly higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress than individuals with secure attachment styles. This finding supports Bowlby's (1982) attachment theory, which emphasizes that early attachment relationships shape individuals' emotion regulation and stress-coping skills. It is noted that individuals with secure attachment patterns use more functional coping strategies in stressful situations, whereas insecure attachment styles are associated with negative affect and psychological vulnerability (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

The findings related to the gender variable indicated that young adults' levels of depression, anxiety, and stress did not differ significantly between female and male participants. This result may stem from the fact that university students within a similar age group and under comparable academic conditions are exposed to similar psychosocial stressors regardless of gender. Indeed, Nurkan (2020) also reported no significant differences between gender and levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. In this context, it is considered that mental health problems among university-aged young adults should be addressed not solely on the basis of gender, but rather within the framework of developmental and relational factors.

Another important finding of the study is that perceived parental attitudes play a distinguishing role in young adults' levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. The findings show that young adults with democratic parental attitudes have lower DAS total scores, whereas authoritarian and inconsistent parental attitudes are associated with higher levels of psychological distress. These results are consistent with the literature indicating that parental attitudes have determining effects on individuals' self-perception, emotional security, and capacity to cope with stress (Gönenç, 2025; Kaplan, 2025). In particular, it is thought that inconsistent and controlling parental behaviors perceived during childhood may increase psychological vulnerability in later years.

The findings regarding the distribution of attachment styles according to relationship status are also noteworthy. Fearful attachment was found to be more prevalent among young adults who were not in a relationship, whereas dismissing attachment was more common among individuals who were dating, engaged, or married. These findings indicate a certain relationship between young people's romantic relationship experiences and their attachment patterns. In the literature, it is emphasized that individuals with secure attachment styles tend to establish more balanced and sustainable relationships, while dismissing and fearful attachment styles are associated with difficulties in intimacy, trust, and emotional sharing (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). In this respect, the findings of the present study support the existing literature.

When the distribution of attachment styles by gender was examined, dismissing and fearful attachment styles were found to be relatively more prevalent among women, whereas secure attachment was more common among men. This finding is consistent with the results of the study conducted by Erözkan (2011) with university students. The widespread presence of dismissing attachment in both genders suggests that this attachment style may be a common pattern among university-aged young adults. It is considered that dismissing attachment,

characterized by a positive self-concept and a distant attitude toward others, may be related to the search for autonomy during young adulthood (Dilmaç et al., 2009).

The findings obtained from correlation and regression analyses revealed significant and positive relationships between attachment styles and levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. The fact that insecure attachment styles significantly predicted DAS total scores indicates that attachment patterns have a strong impact on young adults' mental health. These findings are consistent with previous studies showing that higher levels of secure attachment reduce psychological distress, whereas insecure attachment patterns function as risk factors (Nurkan, 2020; Köse, 2021).

Overall, the lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress observed among young adults with secure attachment styles suggest that secure attachment may function as a protective factor during young adulthood. Meeting individuals' emotional needs in a consistent and supportive manner from early childhood onward may contribute to perceiving the social environment as safer and coping more effectively with stress in later life. In this context, the findings of the present study demonstrate the importance of attachment styles for young people's mental health from a holistic perspective.

Based on the findings obtained from this study, it is considered important that preventive and developmental efforts aimed at supporting young adults' mental health be addressed within the framework of attachment styles. In particular, it is recommended that psychoeducational programs aimed at strengthening emotional awareness, establishing secure relationships, and improving stress-coping skills be expanded within university counseling services for young adults with dismissing, fearful, and preoccupied attachment patterns. In addition, the finding that parental attitudes are associated with young people's levels of depression, anxiety, and stress indicates that awareness-raising initiatives for families and interventions supporting parenting skills may serve a protective function in the field of mental health. Nevertheless, the study has some limitations. The research was conducted with young adults aged 18–24 who were studying at a single university, and the generalizability of the findings is limited by these sample characteristics. Moreover, the variables of relationship status and perceived parental attitudes were restricted to certain categories, and conditions such as divorced, widowed, or alternative family structures were excluded. The use of self-report measures for data collection may also be considered a limitation in terms of social desirability bias. Future studies using larger and more diverse samples, as well as longitudinal and mixed-method designs, may more comprehensively reveal changes over time and causal relationships regarding the effects of attachment styles on mental health.

## DECLARATIONS

### Author Contributions

R.G.D., Ş.A., and E.E. contributed to the identification of the research topic, data collection, data entry, and reporting of the study. Ö.B. provided supervision throughout all stages of the research and contributed to the data analysis and reporting processes.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding this article.

### Ethics Committee Approval

The study protocol was approved by the Ahi Evran University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee (Decision No: 2024/711-20, dated October 16, 2024). The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards set forth in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its subsequent amendments.

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## AI Declaration

During the preparation of this manuscript, Gemini (Google) was used for language improvement, translation, and text editing purposes. The authors reviewed and edited all AI-assisted content and take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the final manuscript.

## Data Availability Statement

The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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