



Attachment Style Profiles Across Depression Levels among Undergraduate Students: A Descriptive Study

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe attachment style profiles based on depression levels among undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education, Universitas Negeri Jakarta. A descriptive quantitative design was employed. The respondents consisted of 738 students from the 2016, 2017, and 2018 cohorts, selected using proportional stratified random sampling. Data were collected using the Adult Attachment Scale (AAS) and the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI). The AAS classified students into secure, avoidant, anxious/ambivalent, and combined attachment categories, while the BDI classified depression levels. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations. The findings show that secure attachment was the dominant profile across the three cohorts. Most students were categorized within normal mood fluctuation and mild mood disturbance levels, although smaller proportions were found in borderline clinical depression, moderate depression, severe depression, and extreme depression categories. These findings provide an initial profile of students' attachment and depression patterns and highlight the need for preventive mental health support in higher education.

Keywords: *Attachment Style; Depression Level; Undergraduate Students; Descriptive Quantitative Study; Higher Education Mental Health.*

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INTRODUCTION

University students are in a developmental transition period marked by academic demands, social adjustment, identity formation, and preparation for future careers. These changes may affect their emotional wellbeing and make them vulnerable to psychological difficulties, including loneliness, stress, and depressive symptoms. In the current digital era, patterns of social interaction and learning have also changed significantly, creating new challenges for students' mental health (Gadsby & Smith, 2023). Previous studies have reported that university students spend considerable time

using social media for communication and interaction (Assefa et al., 2023; Juwita et al., 2025). However, students' mental health should not be understood only from the perspective of digital interaction, but also from broader psychosocial factors, including attachment style, interpersonal relationships, and emotional regulation.

Depression among university students has become an important concern in higher education. Kedang et al. (2020) reported that the prevalence of depression among university students reached 39%. Depression may affect students' motivation, academic performance, social relationships, and readiness to perform future professional roles. In this context, attachment style is one of the important psychological aspects to consider. Attachment style refers to emotional and behavioural patterns formed through early interactions with significant attachment figures, which may influence how individuals perceive themselves, relate to others, regulate emotions, and seek support (Bowlby, 1982). In adulthood, attachment style is commonly categorized into secure, avoidant, and anxious/ambivalent patterns (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Previous studies have shown that attachment style is related to students' emotional wellbeing. Secure attachment is generally associated with better emotional regulation, interpersonal trust, and psychological adjustment, while insecure attachment styles, such as avoidant and anxious/ambivalent attachment, are often linked to emotional distress and depressive symptoms (Ozeren, 2022; Tao et al., 2025). Erozkhan (2011) found that insecure attachment styles contributed to depression among students in a faculty of education context. Similarly, Fang and Wang (2024) reported a relationship between attachment and depression among college students, while Tadayonghotbabadi and Naseri (2025) highlighted the relevance of attachment styles in understanding emotional distress among students with depressive symptoms. These studies indicate that attachment style is an important framework for understanding students' psychological conditions.

The Faculty of Education, Universitas Negeri Jakarta, provides a relevant context for examining attachment style profiles and depression levels. Students in this faculty are prepared to become future educators, including teachers, lecturers, and educational support professionals. As prospective educators, they are expected to develop emotional stability, empathy, communication skills, and healthy interpersonal relationships. Therefore, understanding their attachment style profiles is important not only for their personal wellbeing but also for their future professional readiness. Academic demands, teaching practice, microteaching, final-year projects, and career preparation may create additional pressure that affects students' emotional condition.

Although previous studies have examined the relationship between attachment style and depression, descriptive evidence regarding how attachment style profiles are distributed across depression levels among Indonesian undergraduate students remains limited. Most existing studies tend to focus on the strength of relationships between variables, while fewer studies provide a detailed profile of attachment styles across different depression-level categories in a faculty of education context. Therefore, this study aims to describe attachment style profiles based on depression levels among undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education, Universitas Negeri Jakarta. By presenting a descriptive profile, this study is expected to provide initial empirical information that may support counselling services, mentoring programmes, and preventive mental health initiatives in higher education.

THEORY

Attachment Styles

Attachment theory was introduced by Bowlby (1982), who explained attachment as an enduring emotional bond between individuals and significant attachment figures. Attachment develops through early interpersonal experiences and may influence how individuals perceive themselves, relate to others, regulate emotions, and seek support. In adulthood, attachment styles are commonly categorized into secure, avoidant, and anxious/ambivalent patterns (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Secure attachment is generally characterized by comfort in establishing close relationships, trust in others, and the ability to seek and provide support. Avoidant attachment is characterized by discomfort with emotional closeness, reluctance to depend on others, and a tendency to maintain interpersonal distance. Meanwhile, anxious/ambivalent attachment is characterized by fear of rejection, excessive concern about the availability of others, and a strong need for closeness. These attachment styles provide an important framework for understanding students' interpersonal and emotional functioning.

Depression

Depression is a psychological condition involving disturbances in mood, cognition, motivation, behaviour, and physical functioning. Burns (1980) explains that depression may occur when stress and negative emotional experiences are not managed effectively. Beck and Alford (2009) further describe depression as a condition marked by mood changes, negative self-concept, self-criticism, self-blame, reduced motivation, and changes in activity levels.

In university students, depressive symptoms may appear in various forms, such as sadness, pessimism, loss of interest, guilt, sleep disturbance, fatigue, social withdrawal, and reduced academic motivation. These symptoms are important to examine because university students face academic, social, and developmental demands during the transition to young adulthood.

Attachment Styles and Depression

The relationship between attachment styles and depression has been widely discussed in psychological and educational research. Secure attachment is often associated with better emotional regulation, interpersonal trust, and adaptive coping strategies. In contrast, insecure attachment styles, including avoidant and anxious/ambivalent attachment, have been linked in previous studies to emotional distress and depressive symptoms (Spruit et al., 2020; Colonnello et al., 2022).

For university students, attachment patterns may shape how they respond to academic pressure, social adjustment, interpersonal conflict, and emotional difficulties. Students with secure attachment may be more likely to seek support and regulate their emotions adaptively, while students with avoidant attachment may suppress emotional needs and avoid closeness. Students with anxious/ambivalent attachment may experience excessive worry about rejection or the availability of significant others. These patterns are relevant for understanding students' depression levels, particularly in the context of prospective educators who are expected to develop emotional stability and healthy interpersonal relationships.

Based on this theoretical foundation, the present study focuses on describing attachment style profiles based on depression levels among undergraduate students. The study does not aim to test causal or predictive relationships, but rather to provide a descriptive overview of how attachment styles are distributed across depression-level categories.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive quantitative approach. This approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to describe undergraduate students' attachment style profiles based on their levels of depression, without examining causal, predictive, or inferential relationships. The research was conducted at the Faculty of Education, Universitas Negeri Jakarta. The population consisted of undergraduate students from the 2016, 2017, and 2018 cohorts.

Respondents were selected using proportional stratified random sampling to ensure that each cohort was proportionally represented. From a total population of 2,558 students, the final sample consisted of 738 students. The respondents comprised 272 students from the 2016 cohort, 260 students from the 2017 cohort, and 206 students from the 2018 cohort. The respondents were generally within the age range of 18 to 20 years.

Data were collected using questionnaires. Two instruments were used in this study: the Adult Attachment Scale (AAS) and the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI). The Adult Attachment Scale was used to identify students' attachment styles. The adapted AAS consisted of 18 items and classified attachment styles into three categories: secure, avoidant, and anxious/ambivalent. The secure attachment category consisted of items 3, 4, 7, 13, 14, and 17; the avoidant category consisted of items 1, 2, 5, 15, 16, and 18; and the anxious/ambivalent category consisted of items 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12. The classification of attachment style was determined based on the highest score obtained in each category. If respondents obtained equal dominant scores across more than one category, they were classified into a combined attachment style category.

The Beck Depression Inventory was used to measure students' depression levels. The adapted BDI consisted of 21 symptom items, with each item scored from 0 to 3. The total score was interpreted into six depression-level categories: scores of 1–10 indicated normal mood fluctuations, 11–16 indicated mild mood disturbance, 17–20 indicated the borderline of clinical depression, 21–30 indicated moderate depression, 31–40 indicated severe depression, and scores above 40 indicated extreme depression.

Both instruments were tested for validity and reliability using SPSS version 16.0 for Windows. The validity test of the Adult Attachment Scale showed that all 18 items were valid, with item-total correlation coefficients ranging from 0.256 to 0.733. The validity test of the Beck Depression Inventory showed that 20 of the 21 items were valid, with valid item-total correlation coefficients ranging from 0.330 to 0.770. One item, namely item 19, did not meet the validity criterion and was therefore treated carefully in the interpretation of the depression scale.

The data were analysed using descriptive statistics. The analysis included frequency distributions, percentages, and cross-tabulations. The results were presented to describe: first, the distribution of students' attachment styles; second, the distribution of students' depression levels; and third, the profile of attachment styles based on

depression levels across the 2016, 2017, and 2018 cohorts. Since this study used a descriptive quantitative design, the findings were not intended to establish causal relationships, predictive effects, or statistical significance.

RESULTS

This section presents the descriptive findings of the study. The results are organized into three parts: the distribution of students' attachment styles, the distribution of students' depression levels, and the profile of attachment styles based on depression levels among students from the 2016, 2017, and 2018 cohorts.

Table 1. Attachment Style Profile of Faculty of Education Students from the 2016–2018 Cohorts

Cohort	Attachment Style	Number of Students	Percentage
2016	Secure	207	76.1%
	Avoidant	59	21.7%
	Anxious/ Ambivalent	4	1.5%
	Secure, Avoidant, Anxious/ Ambivalent	2	0.7%
	Total	272	100%
2017	Secure	174	66.9%
	Avoidant	76	29.2%
	Anxious/ Ambivalent	5	1.9%
	Secure, Avoidant, Anxious/ Ambivalent	5	1.9%
	Total	260	100%
2018	Secure	160	77.7%
	Avoidant	30	14.6%
	Anxious/ Ambivalent	14	6.8%
	Secure, Avoidant, Anxious/ Ambivalent	2	1.0%
	Total	206	100%

Table 1 presents the distribution of students' attachment styles across the three cohorts. The findings show that secure attachment was the most dominant attachment style in all cohorts. In the 2016 cohort, most students were categorized as having a secure attachment style, followed by avoidant attachment, anxious/ambivalent attachment, and a combined attachment profile. A similar pattern was found in the 2017 and 2018 cohorts, although the proportion of avoidant attachment was higher in the 2017 cohort than in the other cohorts. Meanwhile, the anxious/ambivalent attachment style appeared in smaller proportions across the cohorts.

Overall, the data indicate that most students in the Faculty of Education demonstrated a secure attachment style. However, a smaller number of students were

categorized as having avoidant, anxious/ambivalent, or combined attachment styles. These findings provide an initial descriptive profile of students' attachment tendencies across different cohorts.

Table 2. Profile of Depression Levels among Faculty of Education Students from the 2016–2018 Cohorts

Cohort	Score	Depression Level	Number of Students	Percentage
2016	1–10	Mood swings are considered normal	113	41.5%
	11–16	Mild mood disturbances or mild feelings of sadness	76	27.9%
	17–20	On the borderline of clinical depression	41	15.1%
	21–30	Moderate depression	31	11.4%
	31–40	Severe depression	4	1.5%
	>40	Extreme depression	5	1.8%
	Total		272	100%
2017	1–10	Mood swings are considered normal	103	39.6%
	11–16	Mild mood disturbances or mild feelings of sadness	75	28.8%
	17–20	On the borderline of clinical depression	36	13.8%
	21–30	Moderate depression	32	12.3%
	31–40	Severe depression	11	4.2%
	>40	Extreme depression	1	0.4%
	Total		260	100%
2018	1–10	Mood swings are considered normal	81	39.3%
	11–16	Mild mood disturbances or mild feelings of sadness	69	33.5%
	17–20	On the borderline of clinical depression	28	13.6%
	21–30	Moderate depression	24	11.7%
	31–40	Severe depression	4	1.9%
	>40	Extreme depression	0	0.0%
	Total		206	100%

Table 2 shows the distribution of students' depression levels based on the Beck Depression Inventory score categories. Across the three cohorts, the category of normal mood fluctuations was the most frequently observed depression level. This category was

followed by mild mood disturbance, borderline clinical depression, and moderate depression. Severe and extreme depression were found in smaller proportions.

The 2016 cohort showed the highest proportion of students in the normal mood fluctuation category. The 2018 cohort showed a relatively higher proportion of students in the mild mood disturbance category compared with the other cohorts. Meanwhile, moderate depression appeared across all cohorts in relatively smaller proportions. Severe depression was found in a limited number of students, while extreme depression appeared only in very small proportions.

These findings suggest that most students were categorized within the normal to mild depression range, although a small number of students were found in the moderate, severe, and extreme depression categories.

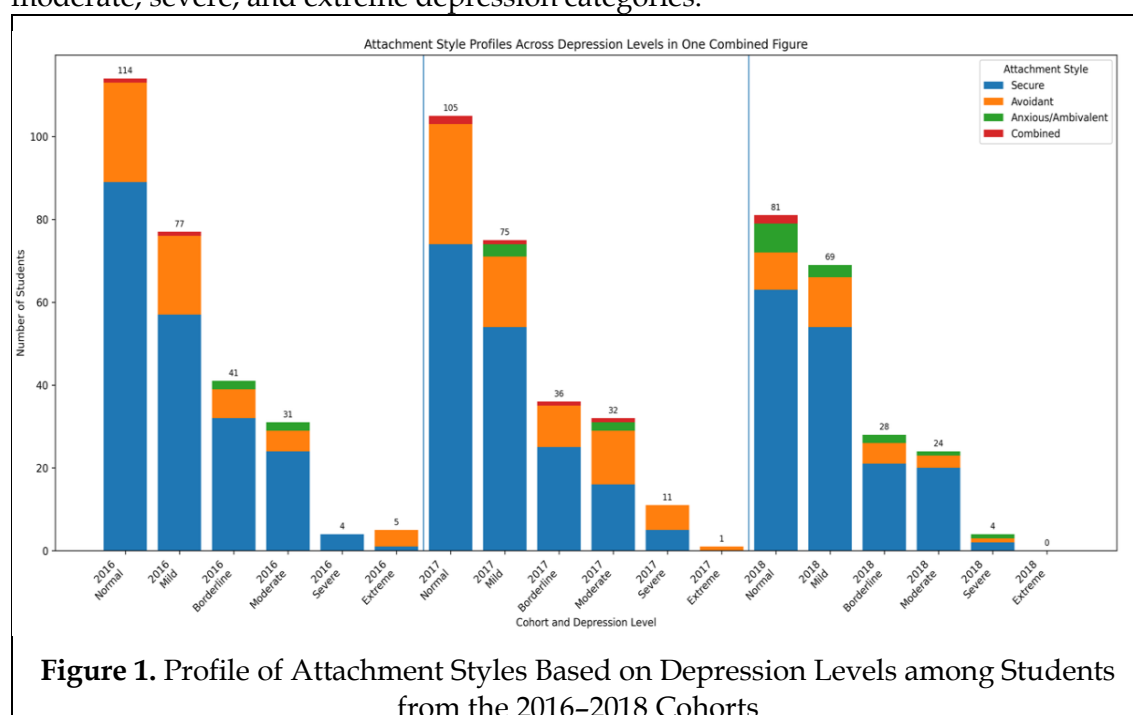


Figure 1. Profile of Attachment Styles Based on Depression Levels among Students from the 2016–2018 Cohorts

Figure 1 presents the cross-tabulation of attachment styles and depression levels across the 2016, 2017, and 2018 cohorts. In general, students with secure attachment were mostly distributed in the normal mood fluctuation and mild mood disturbance categories. This pattern appeared consistently across the three cohorts.

Students with avoidant attachment were also distributed across several depression categories, particularly in the normal mood fluctuation, mild mood disturbance, borderline clinical depression, and moderate depression categories. The 2017 cohort showed a relatively higher number of students with avoidant attachment compared with the other cohorts. Meanwhile, students with anxious/ambivalent attachment appeared in smaller numbers across the depression categories.

The combined attachment profile appeared only in a small number of students. Overall, the descriptive findings indicate that secure attachment was the most dominant profile across depression levels, while avoidant and anxious/ambivalent attachment styles were found in smaller proportions across the cohorts.

Since this study used a descriptive quantitative design, the findings should be interpreted as a description of attachment style profiles and depression level distributions rather than as evidence of causal, predictive, or statistically significant relationships.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that secure attachment was the most dominant attachment style across the 2016, 2017, and 2018 cohorts. This pattern indicates that most students in the Faculty of Education tended to have a positive attachment orientation, as reflected in their ability to trust others, feel comfortable depending on others, and establish close interpersonal relationships. This finding is consistent with Bowlby's attachment theory, which explains that attachment patterns are formed through early interactions with attachment figures and may influence emotional regulation and interpersonal functioning throughout life (Bowlby, 1982). In the context of university students, secure attachment may serve as an important interpersonal resource that helps students manage academic and social demands. Previous studies also indicate that secure attachment is negatively associated with depressive symptoms and is related to better psychological adjustment among students (Spruit et al., 2020; Tao et al., 2025).

The descriptive results also show that normal mood fluctuation was the most frequently observed depression category across the three cohorts. This finding suggests that the majority of respondents were not categorized in moderate, severe, or extreme depression levels. However, the presence of students in borderline clinical depression, moderate depression, severe depression, and extreme depression categories indicates that psychological vulnerability still exists among a smaller proportion of students. This finding is important because students in the Faculty of Education are prospective educators who are expected to develop emotional stability, empathy, and healthy interpersonal relationships in their future professional roles. Therefore, even though most students were found in the normal to mild categories, those with higher depression scores still need attention through preventive and supportive mental health programmes.

In relation to attachment style and depression levels, the cross-tabulation shows that students with secure attachment were mostly distributed in the normal mood fluctuation and mild mood disturbance categories. This pattern supports the view that secure attachment is related to more adaptive emotional regulation and greater capacity to seek support when facing difficulties. Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) explain that securely attached individuals tend to use constructive coping strategies and are more open to receiving support from others. In the context of this study, the dominance of secure attachment among respondents may indicate that many students possess positive interpersonal resources that help them deal with academic pressure and social transitions during university life. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies showing that secure attachment is linked to lower depressive tendencies and better mental health outcomes (Spruit et al., 2020; Tao et al., 2025).

Meanwhile, avoidant attachment appeared in smaller proportions but was found across several depression categories, including borderline clinical depression, moderate depression, severe depression, and extreme depression. The 2017 cohort showed a relatively higher number of students with avoidant attachment compared with the other

cohorts. This finding can be understood through the concept of attachment deactivation proposed by Mikulincer and Shaver (2007). Individuals with avoidant attachment tend to suppress attachment needs, distance themselves from emotional closeness, and minimize the expression of distress. Such tendencies may make it more difficult for students to seek interpersonal support when facing emotional or academic difficulties. This interpretation is supported by previous studies indicating that avoidant attachment is associated with depressive symptoms, interpersonal difficulties, and less adaptive emotion regulation strategies (Cyranowski et al., 2002; Colonnello et al., 2022; Ozeren, 2022).

The anxious/ambivalent attachment style was found in a smaller number of students across the three cohorts. In the 2018 cohort, this attachment style appeared more frequently than in the 2016 and 2017 cohorts. Students with anxious/ambivalent attachment are generally characterized by fear of rejection, excessive need for closeness, and concern about the availability of significant others. These characteristics may make individuals more emotionally sensitive to interpersonal stressors. Previous studies have shown that anxious attachment is related to emotional distress, maladaptive regulation strategies, and depressive symptoms among university students (Fang & Wang, 2024; Tadayonghotbabadi & Naseri, 2025). However, in this study, the findings should be interpreted descriptively because the analysis did not test the statistical relationship between anxious/ambivalent attachment and depression levels.

The findings also show that insecure attachment styles, including avoidant and anxious/ambivalent attachment, were present across different levels of depression, although in smaller proportions than secure attachment. This pattern is consistent with previous research suggesting that insecure attachment may be related to vulnerability in emotional and interpersonal functioning (Amani et al., 2017; Noroozi Homayoon et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the present study does not claim that insecure attachment causes depression. Instead, the findings provide a descriptive profile showing that some students with insecure attachment tendencies were also found in higher depression categories. This descriptive pattern can be used as an initial basis for identifying students who may need emotional and interpersonal support.

These results should also be understood within the broader developmental context of undergraduate students. University students are in a transition period marked by academic demands, social adjustment, identity development, and preparation for future careers. In this context, attachment style may interact with various psychosocial factors, such as peer relationships, academic pressure, family support, and individual coping capacity. Davila, Karney, and Bradbury, as cited in Indrawati and Fauziah (2012), explain that attachment style may be influenced by situational changes, relational schemas, personality, and environmental factors. Therefore, although the present study does not examine causal mechanisms, the findings suggest that attachment style and depression level are important indicators for understanding students' psychosocial needs.

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the importance of strengthening student support systems within the Faculty of Education. Since most respondents showed secure attachment and normal to mild depression levels, the faculty can maintain preventive programmes that support students' emotional wellbeing. At the same time, students categorized under insecure attachment styles or higher depression levels should receive greater attention through counselling services, mentoring

programmes, peer-support activities, and emotional regulation training. University-based mental health support is important because students' psychological wellbeing can affect their academic adjustment, interpersonal relationships, and future professional readiness as educators (Lister et al., 2023; Noroozi Homayoon et al., 2025).

Overall, this study provides a descriptive overview of attachment style profiles based on depression levels among undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education. The findings indicate that secure attachment was the most dominant profile and was mostly found in the normal mood fluctuation and mild mood disturbance categories. Avoidant and anxious/ambivalent attachment styles appeared in smaller proportions but were also distributed across several depression categories. Since this study used a descriptive quantitative design, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence of causality, prediction, or statistical significance. Further studies using correlational, longitudinal, or mixed-method designs are recommended to examine the strength, direction, and underlying mechanisms of the relationship between attachment styles and depression among university students.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a descriptive overview of attachment style profiles based on depression levels among undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education, Universitas Negeri Jakarta. The findings show that secure attachment was the most dominant attachment style across the 2016, 2017, and 2018 cohorts. Most students with secure attachment were distributed in the normal mood fluctuation and mild mood disturbance categories. Meanwhile, avoidant and anxious/ambivalent attachment styles appeared in smaller proportions and were found across several depression-level categories.

The findings also show that most respondents were categorized within normal mood fluctuation and mild mood disturbance levels. However, a small proportion of students were found in borderline clinical depression, moderate depression, severe depression, and extreme depression categories. These results indicate that although the overall profile of students appears relatively positive, psychological vulnerability remains present among some students and should receive institutional attention.

As students in the Faculty of Education are prospective educators, attachment style and emotional wellbeing are important aspects to consider in their academic and professional development. The findings suggest the need for preventive and supportive programmes, such as counselling services, mentoring activities, peer-support programmes, and emotional regulation workshops. These programmes may help students strengthen their interpersonal skills, emotional awareness, and coping strategies.

Since this study employed a descriptive quantitative design, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence of causality, prediction, or statistical significance. Future studies are recommended to use correlational, longitudinal, or mixed-method designs to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between attachment styles and depression levels. Further research may also involve broader populations from different faculties or universities to improve the generalizability of the findings.

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