

Research Article

Peer Attachment and Internalizing Problems in Adolescents

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Abstract.

Peer Attachment is a close relationship between a person and their peers. Adolescents who have suitable attachment to their peers will experience fewer internalizing problems. Internalizing problems is a deepening of a person in dealing with the problems within him excessively. This study aimed to determine the relationship between peer attachment and internalizing problems in adolescents in East Java. This research is a nonexperimental quantitative research with a purposive sampling technique, and the number of samples in this study was 680 people. The criteria for this study were adolescents aged 15–18 years and domiciled in East Java. The scales used are the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). The results showed a negative relationship between peer attachment and internalizing problems marked by the value of $r = -0.327$, $P = 0.000$, which means that the higher the peer attachment in adolescents, the lower the level of internalizing problems they have.

Keywords: adolescence, peer attachment, internalizing problems

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this era of globalization, there are many challenges that adolescents must face. The demands of schools are increasing, including free communication/internet access and written and electronic media broadcasts. Adolescents are required to face these various positive and negative conditions, both those that come from within them and those that come from the surrounding environment.

Adolescence is the transition from childhood to adulthood. Adolescence is often also called the period of “storm and stress,” where at that time, adolescents experience heightened emotionality (increased emotional state) or increased emotional tension caused by physical and psychological changes experienced by adolescents [1]. In adolescence, some physical and psychological changes occur [2]. It is often seen in society that adolescents face problems such as identity crises, high curiosity, always wanting to try new things, and being easily influenced by peers. That then makes individuals unable to control their emotions and themselves well [1]. Adolescence is

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a stage of increased vulnerability to the emergence of emotional and behavioural problems because a person establishes his identity [3].

According to [4], emotional and behavioural problems can be divided into two categories: externalizing and internalizing. Internalizing Problems are behaviours that lead to oneself and are excessively controlled so that they can affect a person's psychological state, such as somatic complaints, social withdrawal, loneliness, depression, and anxiety [5]. According to [6], internalizing problems is an appreciation, a deepening process, or an effort to explore life problems. One that can be taken from internalizing problems is anxiety. Anxiety is a psychological element that describes a person's feelings and emotional states when faced with reality or an event [7]. Research conducted by the [8] found that depression and anxiety are common mental disorders with the highest prevalence.

During this period, adolescents will face various problems that they cannot solve alone without guidance and support from the closest people, in this case, their peers [9]. A person's strong attachment to their parents will be more likely to build good bonds with their peers. *Peer attachment* is a relationship built on trust and confidence [3]. Peer attachment is a person's perception of the extent to which he and his peers can understand each other, communicate well, and get a sense of comfort and security from their peer relations [10]. Developing one's attachment to peers can be done in many places or environments. However, the school or educational environment is most influential as a place to socialize with peers. A critical function of peers is providing and obtaining information about the world outside their family sphere.

Aspects contained in peer attachment include communication, trust, and alienation. In addition, they are communicative interlocutors, open to each other, one-minded, and willing to listen and provide solutions to their peers. This aligns with the opinion [1] that bonds with friends will be tighter because of good communication between individuals seeking closeness and comfort, giving each other advice when in need. Adolescents who establish communication with peers are shown to be open to expressing what they feel and the problems and difficulties they face, which makes their peers sticky figures themselves so that adolescents can form attachments to their peers [5].

[11] researched the relationship of internalization problems with emotional intelligence and social skills in secondary education students. These results prove a link between internalization problems, social skills, and emotional intelligence. States that internalization problems relate to emotional intelligence and social skills in secondary education students, but this relationship differs by gender. Research conducted by Leadbeater et al. [12] on boys and girls aged 11–14 years. In the study, gender was one of the factors.

He also mentioned that the symptoms of internalizing problems are more common in girls than boys.

Arifani (2018) examined peer attachment and student engagement among high school students. The results showed a positive relationship between peer attachment and student engagement behaviours. The higher the peer attachment in students, the higher the student engagement behaviour. Vice versa, the lower the peer attachment, the lower the student engagement behaviour shown [13]. By [14] researched the relationship between attachment to peers and career maturity in students. A positive and significant relationship exists between attachment to peers and career maturity. The safer the attachment to peers, the higher the career maturity. Research conducted by [15] on students who participated in student organizations in their research Producing students who join organizations shows that the closeness that occurs in students who join organizations does not only occur during their meetings and organizational events. It can also happen when they eat, chat, and do chores.

In their research, [16] mentioned that peer attachment has a negative relationship with depression, where depression is one of the symptoms of internalizing problems. By [17], who researched internalizing problems and peer attachment, said adolescents' internalizing problems are negatively related to their peers. The findings explain the importance of friendship bonds adolescents establish for their well-being, and it is hoped that attachment can prevent symptoms of internalizing problems in adolescents.

Based on the literature and previous research on peer attachment and internalizing problems that have been described, researchers concluded that adolescence is a time when a person experiences many problems, with peers expected to be able to reduce these problems. Therefore, researchers felt the need to conduct this study to determine whether there was a negative relationship between peer attachment variables and internalizing problems in adolescents in East Java. The benefit of this study is to determine the picture and relationship between peer attachment and internalizing problems so that the results can help provide an understanding of the importance of peer attachment so that adolescents can go through their growth and development period well.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1. Research Design

This research uses a quantitative approach with data collection in the form of quantitative data, which is then processed using statistical techniques [18]. This research design

uses correlational research, where researchers aim to determine whether or not there is a relationship between variables. However, researchers also aim to predict and explain events related to variables.

2.2. Participants

This study included high school students aged 15–18 in East Java. Sampling in this study uses Nonprobability sampling and purposive sampling techniques, which, according to [18] is a sampling techniques with specific considerations by determining the particular characteristics or criteria researchers need. In this study, researchers involved as many as 681 research subjects with criteria for high school adolescents aged 15–18.

2.3. Research Instruments

This study has two variables: the independent variable (X) is peer attachment, and the dependent variable (Y) is internalizing problems. The peer attachment variable measures three aspects: communication, trust and alienation. While the variable internalizing problems, there are two aspects: emotional problems and peer-relationship problems.

Peer attachment is a person's perception of the extent to which he and his peers can understand, communicate well, and get a sense of comfort and security from their peers. In this study, peer attachment was measured using the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) measuring instrument developed by [10], which has aspects, namely communication, trust, and alienation. This measurement tool measures adolescents' perceptions of attachment to parents and peers. However, in this study, researchers only used peer attachment measuring instruments. Then, this measuring instrument was modified by [19] from previous research that had conducted trials that previously contained 25 items; after trials, it produced valid items into 14 valid items with a reliability score of $\alpha = 0.891$, which researchers could use for data collection. The tool used in the peer attachment scale is using the Likert scale. In the Likert scale, there are four answer choices, namely STS (Strongly Disagree), TS (Disagree), S (Agree), and SS (Strongly Agree).

Internalizing problems are behavioural problems that are self-directed and excessively controlled, thus affecting a person's psychological state, such as social withdrawal, depression, somatic complaints, loneliness and anxiety. SDQ scale is used to measure the internalizing problems, was developed by [20] and translated [21]. There are two types of statements on this scale: favourable and unfavourable. SDQ uses a type of Likert scale with a breakdown of scores on favourable statements, "true" is given a

score of 2, “somewhat true” is given a score of 1, and “incorrect” is given a score of 0. On the other hand, in the unfavourable statement score, “true” is given a score of 0, “somewhat true” is given a score of 1, and “incorrect” is given a score of 2. The results are obtained from the sum of all items, which are then interpreted into mental-emotional levels: normal scores 0-8, borderline scores 9-12, and abnormal 13-40.

2.4. Procedure and Data Analysis

This research has three main procedures. The first preparation stage begins with deepening the material through theoretical studies related to the variables to be studied. They were followed by preparing measuring instruments based on variables that have been selected. The instruments used are IPPA (Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment) and SDQ (Strength & Difficulties Questionnaire). The second stage is the implementation of research; researchers spread the scale on predetermined unique characteristics. This research was conducted in December 2021; scale dissemination was carried out in two ways, namely through g-form and print scale. The last stage is analysis; at this stage, the researcher scores on a scale that has been distributed to the subject, and then the analysis is carried out using Pearson’s Product moment correlation to find out how strong the relationship between variables is.

3. RESULTS

In this study, 681 high school students in East Java were the subjects of the study. The descriptive subject in detail can be seen in Table 1:

TABLE 1: Demographic Data.

Category	Frequency (N=680)	Percentage
Gender		
Male	227	33.4%
Female	453	66.6%
Aged		
15 years old	160	23.5%
16 years old	291	42.8%
17 years old	175	25.7%
18 years old	54	7.9%

Table 1 informs that the majority of participants in this study were female (66.6%) and the remainder were male (33.4%). The majority of participants were 16 years old (42.8%), the rest were 15 years old (23%), 17 years old (25.7%), and 18 years old (7.9%).

The researcher then categorized the frequency of peer attachment level and internalizing problems (IP) of high school students in East Java, as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2: Data Description.

Variable	Category	Interval	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD	
Peer Attachment	Secure	35-56	0-34	539 141	79% 21%	39.78	7.059
	Insecure						
Internalizing Problems (IP)	Normal	0-8	9-12	308 255	45% 38%	8.85	3.625
	Borderline	13-20		117	17%		
	Abnormal						

Table 2 informs that the majority of participants have secure peer attachments (79%), the remainder have insecure peer attachments (21%). Furthermore, the majority of internalizing problems are in the normal category (45%), the rest are borderline (38%), and abnormal (17%).

TABLE 3: Pearson Correlation.

Variabel	Pearson's (r)	Sig. (p)
Peer Attachment – Internalizing Problems	-.327**	0,000

The Table 3 shows a calculation of the Pearson Correlation correlation results ($r = -0.327, p < 0.05$). These results show a negative relationship between peer attachment and internalizing problems.

4. DISCUSSION

Based on the findings of this study, it was obtained that the hypothesis of this study was accepted. After data analysis, peer attachment and internalizing problems had a significant relationship ($p < 0.01, r = -0.327$) with the direction of negative relationships. This means that the higher the peer attachment, the lower the internalizing problems in adolescents. Peer attachment is a factor that can minimize internalizing problems in adolescents. This is also in line with research by [22], which shows a significant correlation between peer attachment and internalizing problems. According to Sullivan [1], they rely more on peers than parents to meet their needs for togetherness, peace of mind, and familiarity. This opinion follows the research results on high school adolescents in East Java, which shows that peer attachment has a significant relationship with internalizing problems.

The results of this study showed that participants had high peer attachment with their peers. Adolescents in East Java can overcome problems because they have suitable peer attachment to their peers that can prevent the emergence of internalizing problems. So, someone has good communication, confidence in themselves and their

peers, and does not feel isolated by their friendship environment. In that case, they are less likely to experience problems that exist in them. This follows the aspects proposed by [10] regarding the quality of attachment to peers, which can be seen from the level of trust, communication and experience of alienation. In addition, in line with what [1] conveyed, the same thing about your bonds with peers will be tighter because of good communication with individuals. Peer attachment can be formed from friendship; then intense two-way communication occurs so that trust between the two people, coupled with the absence of alienation, makes them feel accepted by their peers [23].

Research on the variable internalizing problems showed results in the normal category. This means that the subject in this study shows that they can reduce the problems. In their research, Umami and Turnip (2019) said that peers strongly influence emotional support and can help adolescents deal with stressful situations they face. However, in this study, many subjects were also in the borderline category. In this category, not a few subjects also tend to have symptoms of internalizing problems. Based on previous inconsistent findings, several studies have found that peer attachment to adolescent emotional problems has a poor form of relationship. By [24] stated that the form of the relationship has a poor category. This is because the teenager lacks emotional and social support from his peers. In this study, peer attachment showed results in the high category. While internalizing problems, most subjects lead to the normal category, while some tend to the borderline category. Not all adolescents who have high peer attachment have low internalizing problems. This aligns with research by [25] on losing trust in peers because the friends they entrust form a negative reputation. After all, their peers tell secrets to others, thus causing a loss of trust.

Symptoms of internalizing problems include somatic complaints, depression, social withdrawal, loneliness, and anxiety. Furthermore, research by [13] show that adolescents with good relationships with their peers experience fewer emotional and behavioural problems. In line with the research of [3], high communication and trust towards their peers experience fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Other results in this study also revealed that internalizing problems are more experienced by adolescent girls. In line with research conducted by [26] adolescent girls experience more internalizing problems than boys. This is because many women experience emotional problems such as depression, anxiety, and somatic complaints. Depression experienced by women occurs due to hormonal factors vital in mood swings [27].

Kusumadewi (2012) states that peers have a critical role in adolescents' emotional and social development; even peer influence is more dominant than the family environment. By [28] revealed that secure peer attachment with peers will improve adolescents' self-esteem and social skills. As social skills improve, it will be easier for him to solve

difficulties by seeking advice and social support from his peers. This is reinforced by [29], who states that one of the most critical functions of peers is to provide information about the world outside their family.

The advantage of this study is that it can reveal a relationship between peer attachment and internalizing problems in adolescents in East Java and reveals a high difference in internalizing problems between men and women, where it is known that women have higher internalizing problems than men. The drawback of this study is the number of variable items, which causes respondents not to be optimal in filling the scale of research disseminated.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the study's results, it was found that the hypothesis in this study was accepted, namely the negative relationship between peer attachment and internalizing problems in adolescents in East Java. This shows that the higher the peer attachment, the lower the tendency to experience internalizing problems. This study implies that adolescents are expected to have communication and trust in those around them. Peers are an influence on adolescent development, in addition to their parents. Because, from peers, someone gets much information about the surrounding environment. Then, further researchers expected to be able to study more related to Peer Attachment and Internalizing Problems in adolescents because, in Indonesia, few studies still discuss these two variables.

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Author Contributions

All author conduction concept of the research design, writing introduction, data collection, data processing,
and writing discussion.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare there is no conflict of interest.

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