The Relationship between Attachment Styles and Loneliness among Z Generation in the Klang Valley

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ABSTRACT

Loneliness is a universal phenomenon that happens to individuals across all ages and backgrounds. Previous research reports highlighted that the younger generation, particularly the Z Generation, is experiencing the highest cases of loneliness, that often linked to their various attachment styles. Despite these alarming trends, the underlying basis of such claims remains underexplored. Thus, this study aims to examine the relationship between attachment styles and loneliness among Generation Z in the Klang Valley. This quantitative study employed two validated and reliable instruments: The *Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS)* and the Malay version of the *UCLA Loneliness Scale-8 (ULS-8)*. A total of 410 participants aged between 18 and 28 were selected using convenience sampling, which was recruited via an online platform. The results of the analysis found that there was a significant relationship between the sub-dimension of attachment, namely, anxiety, closeness, and dependence. The findings of this study offer meaningful knowledge to raise awareness of loneliness and attachment among the Z generation. It also provides support for the notion that negative or insecure attachment can lead to a higher level of loneliness. These findings' implications are discussed, considering the expansion of knowledge in designing an appropriate framework to nurture positive attachment during early developmental stages as one of the preventions to loneliness.

Keywords: Attachment style, loneliness, Generation Z, social interaction, parents

INTRODUCTION

Loneliness is a universal issue that often occurs across all ages and backgrounds. It is not an individual problem but a public health issue around the world (Medina, 2025). Loneliness can be understood as a subjective feeling of discomfort due to an absence of meaningful social relations that individuals desire (Perlman & Peplau, 1981). Loneliness is not solely defined by physical loneliness but also encompasses emotional and psychological dimensions (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018). Two types of loneliness have been recognized, namely social loneliness, which is related to a lack of friendships, and emotional loneliness, which refers to dissatisfaction in family or romantic relationships. Previous studies have linked loneliness to higher risks, including physical and mental health problems such as high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, a weakened immune system, anxiety, depression, cognitive deterioration, Alzheimer's, and death (Shankar et al. 2013).

According to Von Soest et al. (2020), loneliness typically occurs in late adolescence and early adulthood, between the ages of 18 and 25 (Kirwan, Burns, O' Súilleabháin, Summerville, McGeehan, McMahon, Gowda, and Creaven, 2025). Young people experience higher levels of loneliness than older people (Baretto et al. 2021; Loren & Varese 2021; Wang et al. 2020). Loneliness among young people may be due to significant life transitions (Mohamed et. al. 2023) such as lifestyle, excessive technology exposure, social pressure, and absence of physical interpersonal contact. Besides, in the digital world and technological era, Generation Z is exposed to various challenges and implications (Das & Bhattacharya, 2025). According to MacDonald et al. (2021), studies have shown that physical or face-to-face interaction is among the important protective factors in reducing loneliness. Although many perspectives on reducing loneliness have been specified in previous studies, the

loneliness issue still occurs today. This perspective may be different from the previous situation, in which nowadays both parents are working and engaged with working commitments (Das & Bhattacharya, 2025). Lifestyle also changed, in which Gen Z showed inclinations toward multigenerational family structures, cohabiting lifestyles, and non-conventional parenting models (Hameed, Ahmad, Kanwal, & Imran, 2025).

Parental bonding or attachment styles may vary significantly among individuals. This may be shaped by a range of factors, including early childhood experiences, caregiver relationships, cultural influences, and personal temperament. Each generation may also be different due to environmental changes, such as the media and technology. Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory states that children's early experiences with caregivers and parents' upbringing patterns can also influence their relationships with others throughout their lives. Previous research has shown that early relationships between children and primary caregivers will form the foundation for their beliefs about the availability and support of social support in adulthood (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth et al., 1978). Individuals with a secure attachment style tend to have a positive interpretation of themselves and are more likely to form healthy and supportive relationships. In contrast, those with an insecure attachment style, such as avoidance or anxiety, often exhibit difficulties in social relationships, potentially increasing the risk of loneliness even when surrounded by many people. In the current situation, the young generation, especially Generation Z, has more exposure to media and technology. One of the studies by Shorter, Turner, & Mueller-Coyne (2022) found that those with an anxious attachment style were significantly more motivated to use social networking sites to decrease loneliness. Utilizing the media platforms primarily to mitigate their feelings of isolation.

Other studies conducted by Goossens et al. (1998) examined the relationship between attachment styles and loneliness among adolescents. The findings showed that adolescents with insecure attachment styles, specifically avoidant and anxious styles, reported higher levels of loneliness than those with secure attachment styles. The study supports the assumption that early experiences in family relationships shape attachment patterns that will influence an individual's emotional well-being in adulthood, including a tendency toward loneliness. Another study conducted by Sahin Kiralp and Serin (2017) involved university students in Cyprus. The study showed that most students showed a 'dismissing' attachment style or dismissive avoidant. Individuals with this attachment style are more independent and avoid emotional involvement in social relationships. They have a positive self-schema but interpret others negatively. The results of the study suggest that environmental and cultural factors play a role in shaping a person's attachment style.

A study by Golchha and Raj (2022) also supports the existence of a significant relationship between attachment style and loneliness among young adults. The results of the study showed that individuals with a secure attachment style reported the lowest level of loneliness, while those with an avoidant attachment style showed the highest tendency to loneliness. Anxious style, on the other hand, showed a moderate relationship with loneliness. The study showed that there was a negative relationship between secure attachment style and loneliness and a positive relationship between insecure attachment style and loneliness. Previous studies have shown consistent results on the relationship between attachment style and loneliness at various ages, but which types of attachment studied varied depending on the theory they refer to. So, the results also probably vary to explain the link between attachment and loneliness across generations. To fill this gap, there is a necessity for conducting studies that scrutinize the aspect of attachment and loneliness among Z, which need to be understood further. Thus, this study aims to examine the interaction or relationship between attachment and loneliness among young adults in Klang Valley.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants and procedures

The study participants were individuals classified as Generation Z born between 1997 and 2012 and aged 13 to 28 years in 2025 (Dimock 2019; Pew Research Center 2022). Data obtained from the Malaysian Youth Development Research Institute (IYRES 2023), the youth population included in Generation Z in the Klang Valley area was 1.687 million people. The Bukhari's sample size calculation (Bukhari 2018) was used to determine the sample size, resulting (N = 410), which was selected in this study, consisting of 75.4% females (n = 309), 24.6% males (n = 101). Students who provided informed consent participated in the research study.

Inclusion criteria were: 1) aged 18 to 28 years in 2025, 2) residing in the Klang Valley area, 3) Able to read and understand Malay and English, 4) Active users of social media.

Attachment style

The Adult Attachment Scale (AAS) was developed by Collins and Read in 1990 and revised in 1996 is used to measure an individual's attachment style. The pattern of emotional and attachment relationships that develop in childhood and continue into adulthood. The attachment scale used contains three main sub-dimensions consisting of six items, making a total of 18 items. The first sub-dimension, closeness, measures the extent to which an individual feels comfortable with closeness and intimacy in relationships. The second sub-dimension, dependency, assesses the individual's ability to rely on and trust others. The third sub-dimension, anxiety, measures a person's level of anxiety about rejection, abandonment, or being unloved in relationships. Each item in this scale is rated using a 5-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (Not at all characteristic of me) to 5 (Very characteristic of me). The total score for each subscale is determined by calculating the average of the six related items, where several items marked with an asterisk, namely items 2, 7, 8, 13, 16, 17, and 18, need to be reverse-scored before calculation is made. Reliability value for the closeness subscale is 0.75, reliability is 0.72, and anxiety is 0.82, indicating a good internal consistency.

Loneliness

Loneliness was assessed using the Malay version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale (ULS-8), which was translated into Malay by Swami (2009) and is suitable for use in Malaysia. The results of the study showed that the structure of ULS-8 is unidimensional. The study tool showed high reliability, namely Cronbach's alpha = 0.83. This scale measures loneliness as a single construct (unidimensional). This questionnaire contains 8 items, which are rated using a 4-point Likert scale: 1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Always. Items 3 and 6 are negative items that need to be reversed-scored before calculating the overall score.

Table 1: Instruments

Variable	Instruments	Developer	Items
Attachment styles	Revised Adult Attachment Scale (AAS)	Collins (1996)	18
Loneliness	Malay version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale (ULS-8)	Swami (2009)	8

RESULTS

Demographic profile

The demographic information of the participants covers several important aspects such as gender, year of birth, age, and race. A total of 410 respondents were involved in this study, and the data were analyzed using descriptive analysis. In terms of gender, the majority of respondents were female, namely 309 people or 75.4%, while the rest were male, namely 101 respondents or 24.6%. Based on age range, the 21 to 24 year old age group was the most dominant with 327 respondents (79.8%), followed by 18 to 20 year old respondents at 48 (11.7%), while the 25 to 28 year old age group recorded the least number at 35 respondents (8.5%). In terms of race, Malay respondents dominated the study with 354 (86.3%), followed by Chinese at 30 (7.3%), Indians at 10 (2.4%), and the rest consisted of Bumiputera from Sabah and Sarawak and other races at 16 (3.9%).

Table 2: Descriptive data of Participants

Demography	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Total
Gender	Men	101	24.6	410
	Women	309	75.4	

Age	18-20 years	48	11.7	410
	21-24 years	327	79.8	
	25-28 years	35	8.5	
Race	Malay	354	86.3	410
	Chinese	30	7.3	
	Indian	10	2.4	
	Others	16	3.9	

Descriptive Statistical Data for the Adult Attachment

Table 1 details the descriptive statistics for each dimension of adult attachment style, namely anxiety, closeness, and dependence. The anxiety dimension, which refers to a person's level of anxiety about rejection and fear of loss in close relationships, shows the highest mean value compared to other dimensions, with a mean score of M = 19.40 and a standard deviation (S.D) = 5.43. The next dimension is closeness, which refers to the individual's level of comfort in establishing emotional intimacy and togetherness with others, showing a mean score of M = 19.09 (s.d. = 3.27). Next, the dependency dimension, which describes the level of trust an individual has in others to get support when needed, shows the lowest mean value of M = 16.45 (s.d. = 3.42). The results of the study showed that anxiety about rejection was more dominant than closeness and individual dependence on others.

Table 3: Descriptive analysis for the adult attachment style

Dimension	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Anxiety	410	19.40	5.43
Closeness	410	19.09	3.27
Dependency	410	16.45	3.42

Descriptive Statistical Data Results for the Loneliness

Table 3 presents the results of the descriptive analysis of loneliness, which showed that the overall mean value for the loneliness scale was 18.40 with a standard deviation is 4.78. The range of scores recorded was between 8 and 30. Overall, this average score gives an initial impression that Generation Z respondents living in the Klang Valley area experienced a moderate level of loneliness.

Table 4: Descriptive analysis of loneliness

Loneliness	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Total Score	410	8	30	18.40	4.78

Correlation Analysis of Adult Attachment Styles

Table 4 shows the results of the Pearson correlation analysis conducted to identify the relationship between each dimension of attachment style, namely anxiety, closeness, and dependence, on the level of loneliness among respondents. The results of the analysis found that there was a significant relationship between the anxiety dimension and the level of loneliness, with a significant value ($r = .432$, $p < .05$). This result shows that there is a moderate positive relationship, namely, the higher the level of anxiety in the relationship, the higher the level of loneliness experienced by the individual. Furthermore, the closeness dimension also showed a significant

relationship with the level of loneliness, with a significant value (r = -.402, p < .05). This correlation is negative, indicating that the higher the level of intimacy in the relationship, the lower the level of loneliness experienced. The dependency dimension also showed a moderately significant negative correlation with loneliness (r = −.431, p < .05), indicating that the higher the level of dependency, the lower the level of loneliness experienced by the individual. Overall, these findings indicate that the anxiety dimension has a positive relationship with loneliness, while the intimacy and dependency dimensions each have a negative relationship. These results illustrate the profile of attachment styles and loneliness among Generation Z in Klang Valley.

Table 5: Correlation between Adult Attachment Style and loneliness

Sub-dimension of Adult Attachment	N	Loneliness	Significant level (P)
Closeness	410	-.402	.000
Dependence	410	-.431	.000
Anxiety	410	.432	.000

*P<0.05

DISCUSSIONS

The current study aimed to address the gap in the literature between attachment styles and loneliness in a different geographical area. This, this study aims to examine the relationship between adult attachment styles and levels of loneliness among 401 respondents aged 17-25 in the Klang Valley. The results were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted, and the result of the analysis shows the direction of the relationship between dimensions and sub-dimensions. The results of the study showed that the attachment sub-dimension, namely anxiety, showed a significant positive relationship with the level of loneliness among Generation Z in the Klang Valley. This means that the higher the individual's anxiety score in a relationship, the higher their tendency to experience loneliness. This moderate positive correlation illustrates that individuals who feel insecure, fear being emotionally rejected, or are too emotionally dependent on others are more likely to feel lonely when the relationship does not go smoothly as they expected. On the contrary, Attachment styles are linked with loneliness, specifically that individuals with secure attachments generally feel less lonely.

This finding is in line with a study by Sahin Kiralp and Serin (2017) conducted on 247 education students at the European University of Lefke, Cyprus, which found that there was a positive correlation between loneliness and preoccupied attachment styles, as well as a negative correlation with dismissive and secure attachment styles. According to the findings, individuals with a preoccupied attachment style tend to seek validation from people who are around them, which explains their tendency to experience high loneliness (Sahin Kiralp & Serin, 2017). The study also stated that individuals with a secure or dismissive attachment style recorded lower levels of loneliness due to their ability to form stable and satisfying social relationships. The results of this study are also supported by the research conducted by Tran and Scholar (2020) that involved a group of young adults in the United States, where individuals with an anxious attachment style tend to have low self-confidence. They experience higher loneliness than individuals with a secure attachment style. Attachment styles play a significant role and have a significant impact in shaping an individual's self-image and determining the extent to which they can establish meaningful relationships.

This study also confirms that unstable emotional attachment contributes to feelings of marginalization and social isolation (Tran & Scholar, 2020). Another study conducted by DiTommaso as early as 1997 also found that individuals with insecure attachment styles, such as anxiety and avoidance, had less satisfying interpersonal relationships, less commitment, and higher levels of loneliness. This type of attachment style category not only affects romantic relationships but also contributes to more chronic loneliness. Meanwhile, the closeness sub-dimension of attachment showed a significant negative relationship with loneliness, meaning that the higher an individual's ability to feel emotionally close to others, the lower the level of loneliness experienced. The

dimensions of closeness and dependence each showed a negative correlation; that is, the higher an individual's ability to feel comfortable sharing intimacy and depending on others, the lower the level of loneliness they experienced.

This finding is in line with Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1969) and the findings of a study by Osei (2025) conducted on international students. Osei's study stated that students with a secure attachment style reported the lowest level of loneliness, while those with an anxious or avoidant attachment style experienced higher levels of loneliness, as they had more difficulty establishing and maintaining close relationships. The dependent sub-dimension showed a significant negative relationship with loneliness. In a study by Breit (2023), it was found that individuals with a secure attachment style had lower levels of loneliness and social anxiety. While the individuals with a secure attachment style tend to enjoy social interaction, have high self-esteem, and are less afraid of rejection, this makes them more sociable and helps them build strong social networks. On the other hand, those with an anxious or avoidant attachment style will have difficulty building relationships due to negative perceptions of themselves and others, which ultimately contributes to feelings of loneliness and isolation (Breit 2023). A study by Shafiq and Iqbal (2024) also agreed that early adults who have close relationships with their friends are less likely to experience feelings of loneliness. The findings of the study highlighted the dimension related to high and low levels of loneliness. The study found that relationships with friends fulfill the basic needs of young adults to form new relationships, thus reducing feelings of loneliness among them. Previous studies mostly supported the present study, which these results shows the direction of different relationships between each dimension of attachment style and the level of loneliness. Even though the findings have proven the relationship between attachment styles and loneliness, further research is needed to explore more contexts of factors that can contribute to loneliness.

There are several limitations to this study. As previously mentioned, data relies on convenience sampling and online recruitment, which may limit generalizability and may not reflect the population we intended to understand, and run the risk of sampling error. Additionally, the sample consisted predominantly of age categories as Gen Z, thus this sample may not be generalizable to most cultures and communities. Besides, the methodology section lacks a detailed justification for sample selection, and it is limited to addressing potential sociocultural factors influencing attachment. For this reason, the present study just to understand the link between the two variables or constructs only. So, the discussion mostly mentioned the same direction and supported the existing literature or findings, in which the contrast is just the demographic perspective.

In conclusion, the present study adds new findings that support the objective of confirming that attachment and loneliness are interrelated, with consistent patterns observed across diverse demographic groups. It is hoped that this study can be expanded to a more comprehensive study that can delve deeper into the perspective of attachment and loneliness. Nevertheless, subsequent research has recommended broadening participant recruitment to encompass individuals from diverse cultural and social backgrounds, thereby enhancing the generalizability and depth of the findings. In further, the causal analysis should be expanded and used in future studies, incorporating regression or mediation analysis could better explain the predictors of loneliness. Future research should consider mixed-methods or longitudinal designs to convey evolving attachment patterns. Including demographic comparisons, for example, gender, race, or age groups, that may also provide greater insights into how attachment and loneliness differ across the populations in Klang Valley.

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