

The Relationship between Attachment Styles, Temperament and Mental Well-Being

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ABSTRACT

Attachment styles play a major role in the development of temperament and individuals' mental well-being. The present study investigates the relationship between attachment styles, temperament and mental well-being. This research employed survey technique and samples involved in this study consisted of 325 youths who currently enrolled in a public university. The instruments used were Revised Adult Attachment Scales, Emotionality, EAS Temperament Survey and Mental Well-being Scale. Results showed that the level of mental well-being of the studied samples was relatively high. Furthermore, there was a significant relationship between attachment styles and mental well-being, however no significant relationship was found for the relationship between attachment styles and temperament. The implications of the findings are discussed.

Keywords: attachment styles, temperament, mental well-being

INTRODUCTION

The construct of mental well-being has experienced a rapid revival at global level as evidenced in the increasing interest to promote individual mental health in various countries. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines health attachment styles "A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (World Health Organisation, 2004). It is a condition of total physical, mental and social well-being, in which a person recognises his or her own capacities, is adept to get by with the normal pressures of life, works industriously, and contributes to his or her society. According to Fen et al. (2013), mental well-being is more than happiness, it involves achieving personal growth, flourishing, living this life at its fullest, and resilience thriving even in times of difficulty. An individual's mental well-being is normally affected by major life events that people have little or no control over such as bereavement, illness, or psychological distress. In these situations, it's about how an individual reacts to such event that will determine its impact on mental well-being.

Mental well-being is equally important as physical well-being especially among youths as they have to adjust their life accordingly as university students and prepare themselves for their future career. A study by Goodwin, Behan, Kelly, McCarthy & Horgan (2016) specifically assessed college students who are at risk for mental health problems. College students were used as sample because college students are at a significant risk for mental

health problems with anxiety and depression to be the most common concerns along with studies generating prevalence estimates as high as 53.8% for moderate to severe depression (Garlow et.al., 2008). The numbers are concerning as few studies have documented how the issues with anxiety and depression negatively affect students' general well-being (Baez, 2005; Miller & Chung, 2009). A number of nine-hundred and three undergraduate students completed a questionnaire comprised of a well-being assessment, depression assessment, anxiety assessment, overall psychological distress assessment, and symptoms and assets screening scale. Results of this study showed that the scores on well-being were significantly correlated with depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms, and overall distress among college students.

Attachment plays a major role in the development of psychopathologies and individual well-being. A vast literature on attachment suggest that individual's attachment styles is related to individual's adjustment in various aspects of life including college adjustment. Attachment is defined as the stable and lasting emotional bond between the infant and the caregiver, characterized by seeking behavior of the infant, especially during stressful conditions that develops as a result of interaction of the infant with its environment from early periods of life (Thompson, 2008). Mother-child relationship is the first primary relationship that serves as a model for latter attachments individual forms later in life (Collins and Laursen, 2004). People with secure attachment have positive view of self and others. Securely attached people are comfortable to accept their difficulties and to seek support, and to disclose their conflicting emotions in a positive way. Dismissing-avoidant people are mainly avoidant, since they have a positive view of self but a negative view of others. They tend to suppress their negative emotion and use avoidance as their major coping strategy (Collins and Laursen, 2003). Preoccupied people hold a negative view of self and positive view of others, and they are anxious.

Temperament is a psychological entity exists from early in life and remains relatively stable that determines behavioral patterns of the individual. In addition to the features in common with the types of attachment, temperament is regarded to be innate, genetically transmitted and has inherent and biological basis (Kesebir et.al., 2005). The attachment pattern one holds, no doubt, is influenced by personal characteristics of the child as well as by the nature of mother-child relationship. In this sense, temperaments of both mother and of the child can be suggested as the determinants of attachment style child forms (Kokcu, & Kesebir, 2010).

Individuals with secure attachment are assumed to have a positive view of self, be capable of establishing healthy relationships, high on self-awareness and well adjusted. Regulation of both negative and positive emotional responses to internal and external stimulants is assumed fundamental for effective coping, problem solving and social functioning in individuals capable of effective emotional regulation. As a result of specific experiences with attachment figures, individuals form the representations of their own strengths, resources and capabilities and develop effective strategies to be able to make emotional regulation during stressful events causing negative emotions (Diamond & Hicks, 2005). People having these characteristics are expected to be in a state of wellness. The purpose of the movement of wellness is to identify health-reinforcing factors in people lives and accordingly to make alterations in their life styles.

University period is an important phase in an individual's life as it involves a transition to adulthood. University students are in the process of transition faced with challenges of adjustment in their academic and social life. This research is important as it aims to contribute to the understanding of attachment styles and temperament in relation to mental well-being in a sample of youth who enrolled as a university student. Specifically, it seeks to 1) investigate the level of mental well-being; 2) examine the relationship between attachment styles and mental well-being and 3) measure the association between temperament and mental well-being.

METHOD

Participants and procedure

The sample consisted of 325 undergraduate students ($n = 325$) from a public university in Malaysia. The respondents voluntarily completed the online survey form. Their age ranged from 19 to 28 years old ($M = 21.70$, $SD = 1.33$). However, the age of 12 respondents were not reported. 24.0 % of them are males ($n = 78$), while 76.0 % of them are females ($n = 247$). In addition, the sample comprised of students from various faculties

(human development, sciences and mathematics, management and economics, human sciences, and art, computing and creative industry).

Measures

Revised Adult Attachment Scale: Adult attachment was measured using Revised Adult Attachment Scale (Collins, 1996). The scale consisted of 18 items and the items were rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all characteristics of me) to 5 (very characteristic of me). The three underlying dimensions captured by this measure were close, anxiety and avoidant attachment. A typical item from this measure (from dependant attachment dimension) was “I find that people are never there when you need them”.

EAS Temperament Scale: The respondents completed the EAS Temperament Survey for adults (Buss & Plomin, 1984). This scale consisted of five underlying dimensions; sociability, distress, activity, fearfulness and anger. It is a 20-items self-report measure and each domain will be represented in four items. For example, one item from the ‘anger’ domain is “When displeased, I let people know it right away”. All items were rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (not characteristics or typical of yourself) to 5 (very characteristic or typical of yourself).

Singapore Mental Well-being Scale: The 30-item Singapore Mental Well-being scale was used to measure the level of mental well-being (Fen, Isa, Chu, Ling, & Ling, 2013). The response format was based on the 9-point Likert scale with 5 as the neutral point, 1 being never, and 9 being always. This measure captured five domains of mental well-being such as resilience, cognitive efficacy, social intelligence, emotional intelligence and Asian self-esteem. A sample item from this scale measured by self-esteem domain was “I am able to contribute positively to the world.”

RESULTS

The level of mental well-being

A one sample t-test was conducted on the mental well-being mean scores of the samples in order to evaluate whether their mean was significantly different from 5, the accepted mean in general. Value five was set as a test value (median) as the mean scores ranged from one (very low) to nine (very high). As value five was set as test value, any value above five was considered high and those below than five was considered low. Results showed that the one sample t-test was significantly different from 5 ($M = 6.95$), with $t(324) = 29.53$, $p = .00$ at .05 alpha level. The mean score was 6.95 and the standard deviation was 1.19. Therefore, the mental well-being scores for this population was significantly above the test value and considered as relatively high.

The relationship between attachment styles, temperament and mental well-being

An Independent-samples t-test was performed to test the relationship between attachment styles, temperament and mental well-being. The independent variable; attachment styles consisted of two levels which were secure and insecure attachments. Initially, the attachment styles consisted of three levels; close, anxiety and avoidant attachment. However, anxiety and avoidant attachment styles were later collapsed and merged as insecure attachment due to equality of group size (Green & Salkind). Temperament and mental well-being were the dependent variables. The obtained results showed that (1) there was no significant relationship between attachment styles and temperament ($p = .064$ at .05 alpha level); and (2) there was a significant relationship between attachment styles and mental well-being ($p = .000$ at .05 alpha level). Hence, it can be concluded that individuals who received secure ($M = 2.91$, $SD = .48$) or insecure attachment styles ($M = 3.00$, $SD = .46$) showed no difference on the level of temperament. However, individuals who received secure attachment ($M = 7.31$, $SD = .99$) showed higher level of mental well-being compared to those with insecure attachment ($M = 6.69$, $SD = 1.25$).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research aims to understand about the factors which contribute to mental well-being of youth. The obtained result showed that the level of mental well-being of the samples was high and it was a good indicator that they

were able to adjust their life accordingly at the university. The university involved in this study consistently conducts self-enrichment and empowerment programmes to assist its students to cope with daily life issues (Jalal, Daud, & Samad, 2015). Furthermore, the university was located at the rural area surrounded with green hills and mountains, and with no traffic congestion issues. The population density at the area was also low (Saleh, Rostam, & Hussain, 2012). Therefore, the surroundings outside the university also did not contribute to psychological distress among the university students.

The obtained result showed that individuals who received secure attachment showed higher level of mental well-being compared to those with insecure attachment. According to Bowlby (1973), the nature and quality of relationships in adulthood are influenced by past experiences that took place during childhood. Individuals who received secure attachment managed to develop positive emotionality, able to actively maintaining social support, and having greater satisfaction in romantic relationships (Gleeson & Fitzgerald, 2014). They can easily involve in intimate relationship as they tend to visualize mental models of themselves as friendly, capable and approachable. They receive support, affection, and trust in their relationship with others, so, they also will portray the same thing as their role models do. Furthermore, past research also showed that the manifestation of secure attachment positively influences the psychological adaptation of individuals (Khaleque, Shirin & Uddin, 2013). Therefore, the finding of this study was consistent with the concept of secure and insecure attachment styles.

One of the components of this mental well-being scales is social intelligence. Shiota et al., (2006) found that individuals who received secure attachment tend to have more positive affect connected with the enjoyment of social relationships. By contrast, individuals with either of the two insecure attachment orientations (anxiously or avoidantly attached individuals) have difficulties controlling their emotions and experiencing positive emotionality as well as achieving life satisfaction. Past studies also revealed that attachment orientation also significantly related to life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect (Chen et al. 2017).

Similar to other studies, this study also has a few limitations. First, although the sample included a considerable number of participants, the generalization of the results might be limited as the samples come from certain background and culture. Furthermore, it was found that most of the samples in this study belong to securely attached group. Second, the obtained findings suggest that future researches are necessary to examine the shared variance between attachment orientations and mental well-being in order to ascertain the unique contribution of each to mental well-being. Besides, it would be interesting to investigate about the role of personality in explaining the link between attachment orientations and mental well-being as different people may react differently under the same situation.

Findings of this study have significant practical implications. It provided understanding about attachment styles, temperament and mental well-being among university students. Mental well-being among university students is particularly important for their adjustment to university life as well as preparation for their future careers. It is worthy to note that understanding the process related to the development of positive mental well-being will help developing more effective treatment strategies and therapies in mental health settings. Since securely attached individuals would exhibit higher level of mental well-being and insecurely attached individuals exhibited lower mental well-being, these attachment association could be modified directly during the course of psychotherapy (Taylor et al. 2014). Thus, findings of this research will provide guidance to counselors, educators as well as mental health practitioners in various settings to provide more effective services, prevention programmes or treatment to the community.

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