



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**STUDY OF ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP AND MENTAL HEALTH
CONDITIONS AMONG ADOLESCENCE IN MIRI**

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Bachelor of Psychology (Honours)

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UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK

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Final Year Project Report

Masters

PhD

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**STUDY OF ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP WITH MENTAL HEALTH
CONDITIONS AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN MIRI**

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in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a
Bachelor of Psychology with Honours

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Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	1
LIST OF TABLES	i
LIST OF FIGURES	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
CHAPTER ONE.....	1
INTRODUCTION	1
1.0 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background of Study	1
1.2 Problem Statement	2
1.3 Research Objectives	3
1.3.1 General Objective.....	3
1.3.2 Specific Objectives.....	3
1.4 Research Questions	4
1.5 Research Hypotheses	4
1.6 Conceptual Framework	5
1.7 Significance of Study.....	6
1.8 Definition of Terms.....	6
1.8.1 Romantic Relationship.....	6
1.8.2 Mental Health.....	6
1.8.3 Adolescents	7
1.9 Summary.....	7
CHAPTER TWO.....	8
LITERATURE REVIEW	8
2.0 Introduction.....	8
2.1 Adolescents, mental health and romantic relationships.....	8
2.2 Erik Erikson Psychosocial Development Theory.....	9
2.3 Previous Findings.....	10
2.5 Summary.....	12
CHAPTER THREE.....	13
METHODOLOGY.....	13
3.0 Introduction.....	13
3.1 Research Design	13
3.2 Population and Sample.....	13
3.3 Instruments	14

3.3.1 Instrument Structure.....	14
3.4 Data Collection Procedures	15
3.5 Data Analysis Procedures	15
3.5.1 Descriptive Data Analysis	16
3.5.2 Inferential Data Analysis.....	17
3.6 Summary.....	18
CHAPTER FOUR.....	20
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION	20
4.0 Introduction.....	20
4.1 Demographic Data.....	20
4.1.1 Gender of Participants.....	20
4.1.2 Age of participants	22
4.1.3 Race of participants.....	23
4.1.4 Religion of participants.....	24
4.1.5 Origin of participants.....	26
4.1.6 Involvement in romantic relationship.....	28
4.1.7 Partner’s age.....	29
4.1.8 Current Status.....	30
4.2 Inferential Data.....	32
4.2.1 Results of Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21)	32
4.2.2 Relationship-Assessment Scale (RAS).....	36
4.2.3 Pearson’s Correlation between DASS-21 mean and RAS mean	38
4.2.4 ANOVA test of RAS toward DASS-21	41
4.2.5 Independent T-test male and female.....	49
4.3 Conclusion	51
LIMITATION, IMPLICATION, RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION.....	52
5.0 Introduction.....	52
5.1 Limitations of Study.....	52
5.2 Implications	53
5.3 Recommendations.....	54
5.4 Conclusion	55
REFERENCES	57
APPENDIX A	59
APPENDIX B	63
APPENDIX C	75

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: RAS scoring (Hendrick, 1998 as cited in greenspace.com, 2019)	16
Table 2: DASS-21 Scoring Lovibond (2005).....	17
Table 3: Pearson Correlation Coefficient (Akoglu, 2018 as cited in de Andres- Sanchez et al., 2021, p.4).....	18
Table 4: Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Gender	20
Table 5: Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Age.....	22
Table 6: Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Age.....	23
Table 7: Frequency and Percentage of Participants' religion.....	24
Table 8: Frequency and Percentage of Participants' origin.....	26
Table 9: Frequency and Percentage of Participants' involvement in romantic relationship..	28
Table 10: Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Partner Age.....	29
Table 11: Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Current Status.	30
Table 12: Depression scores in DASS-21	32
Table 13: Anxiety scores in DASS-21	33
Table 14: Stress scores in DASS-21	34
Table 15: RAS score	36
Table 16: Pearson Correlation analysis of DASS-21 mean and RAS mean	38
Table 17: Results of RAS- Depression ANOVA test.....	41
Table 18: Results of RAS-Anxiety ANOVA test.....	43
Table 19: Result of RAS-Stress ANOVA test.....	45
Table 20: Independent T-test results between genders, RAS mean and DASS mean.....	49

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study.....	5
Figure 2: Pie Chart of Participants' Gender	21
Figure 3: Bar Chart of Participants' Ages.....	22
Figure 4: Bar Chart of Participants' Race.....	24
Figure 5: Pie Chart of Participants' Religion	25
Figure 6: Bar Chart of Participants' Origin.....	26
Figure 7: Bar Chart of Participants' Involvement in Romantic Relationship	28
Figure 8: Bar Chart of Participants' Partner age.....	29
Figure 9: Pie Chart of Participants' current romantic relationship status.....	30
Figure 10: Bar chart of Depression in DASS-21	32
Figure 11: Bar chart of Anxiety score in DASS-21.....	33
Figure 12: Bar chart of Stress scores in DASS-21.....	35
Figure 13: RAS scores	36
Figure 14: Scatterplot of Correlation between DASS-21 mean and RAS mean	38

ABSTRACT

Study of romantic relationships and mental health condition among adolescents in Malaysia are still insufficient and low in number. This study involved 109 students from form 1 (13 years old) to upper six class (19 years old) in one of the secondary schools in Miri, Sarawak. Google form Questionnaires were randomly distributed among samples via online platform, WhatsApp with helps from 'Unit Bimbingan dan Kaunseling' from that school, some teachers and also student representatives from few clubs after getting permission from the school management. The questionnaire consists of informed consent, demographic questions, Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) and Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21). Pearson's Correlation, ANOVA test and Independent T-test were conducted for data analysis procedure. Outcome of this study proposed that there is a significant relationship between satisfaction in romantic relationships and mental health condition among adolescents with negative moderate correlation. Next, there are significant result of ANOVA test for RAS-depression, RAS- anxiety and RAS- stress. After conducting independent T-test, proven that there is also significant gender difference in term of satisfaction in romantic relationships and mental health condition. These results are aligned with past related studies and can be supported with Erik Erikson Psychosocial Development Theory.

Keywords: Adolescents, Romantic relationships, mental health

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research outline of this study which begin with explaining the background of romantic relationship, mental health, and adolescents in Miri, Sarawak. Problem statement, objective, research questions, and conceptual framework also being stated in this chapter. In addition, the significance, limitation, and definition terms of this study are being noted too.

1.1 Background of Study

Love is an important and necessary aspect in human life. This statement can be supported with many theories and perspectives including from those remarkable figures in psychological field. As Schultz and Schultz (2017) notes that “The basic strength that emerges from the intimacy of the young adult years is love, which Erik Erikson considered to be the greatest of all human virtues”. Physiological, safety, belongingness and love, esteem and self-actualization needs are component in hierarchy of five innate needs that operate and influence human behaviour (Schultz & Schultz, 2017; Maslow, 1968, 1970b). One of the ways to express this virtue is through romantic relationships with other especially during the stages of adolescent and young adulthood. Development of romantic relationships are important during adolescent and emerging adulthood which are the second and third decades in life (Lopez, Viejo & Ruiz, 2019). Meanwhile, mental health is a psychological condition of human such as cognitive, emotions, behaviours, and others. World Health Organization (2018) state that “Mental health can be defined as a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her abilities, can cope

with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and can make a contribution to his or her community”.

This study aimed to investigate the effect of having romantic relationship toward mental health of adolescents and the relationships between these two variables. As we know that in adolescence period, love is not the main virtue as identity formation is the dominant virtue during this stage of life. The knowledge and information of having romantic relationship and its impact toward young age’s individual is still under-developed as there are insufficient study to investigate the correlation of these 2 aspects. Romantic relationships indeed play a crucial role in individual’s well-being as suggested by verified systematic observations, however number of studies focusing on adolescence remain relatively limited which results in unclarified result (Lopez, Viejo & Ruiz, 2019). Furthermore, most of the studies conducted to study these aspects are based on western countries’ settings. Studies for these romantic relations and mental health of adolescent scarce in number for eastern countries and to be more specific in Malaysia. The results obtained were not similar with those studies conducted for westerners as distinct cultural aspect results in various outcome in individuals physically, psychologically and socially. For instance, some part of Malaysian’s community has pessimistic perspective toward having romantic relationships in adolescence ages compare to several western countries which consider it is quite normal for people in this stage in life to have such relationships.

1.2 Problem Statement

Adolescence age is critical for identity formation of an individual. This is a tough and complex process for most people. Identity acquiring and formation are challenging task as it is occupied

with anxiety consistently due to trying and analysing process of various roles and ideologies to determine the most suitable self of an adolescence (Schultz & Schultz, 2017). However, if an adolescent interferes this stage with love and romantic aspects, there are pessimistic perspectives that perceive this action will negatively affect the identity formation. As Lopez, Viejo and Ruiz (2019) note that “Romantic relationships have also been associated with negative outcomes, especially during adolescence. Thus, studies have suggested that romantic involvement may be related to the presence of different forms of violence, experiencing internalizing symptoms such as depression or anxiety, poorer psychosocial functioning, or delinquency”. On the other hand, there are also positive view regarding romantic relationship in adolescence age. During adolescence, romantic relations is an emerging developmental task which then will become important development task in next stage of life according to developmental task theory (Lopez, Viejo & Ruiz, 2019; Furman & Collibee, 2014). Hence, this ambiguous perspective regarding involvement of adolescent with romantic relations was studied among adolescents in one of the secondary schools in Miri so that better understanding and care of adolescents can be achieved.

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 General Objective

To study romantic relationship and mental health conditions among adolescents in Miri.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

a) To study the significance of romantic relationship toward mental health conditions among adolescents in one of the secondary schools in Miri.

b) To study the relationship of satisfaction in romantic relationship and mental health conditions among adolescents in one of the secondary schools in Miri.

c) To compare differences between male and female when involved in romantic relationship among adolescents in term of mental health.

1.4 Research Questions

The question of this study:

- a) What is the effect of romantic relationship toward mental health conditions among adolescents in Miri?
- b) What is the relationship of satisfaction in romantic relationship and mental health conditions among adolescents in Miri?
- c) What are the differences between male and female in term of having romantic relationship within adolescence phase and their condition of mental health?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

H1: There is significant different of romantic relationship toward mental health condition of adolescents.

H1: There is relationship between satisfaction in romantic relationship with mental health condition of adolescents.

H1: There is significant relationship between male and female adolescents in term of having romantic relationship and condition of mental health.

Null Hypothesis

H0: There is no significant of romantic relationship toward mental health conditions of adolescents.

H0: There is no relationship between satisfaction in romantic relationship with mental health conditions of adolescents.

H0: There is no significant different in relationship between male and female adolescents in term of having romantic relationship and condition of mental health.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

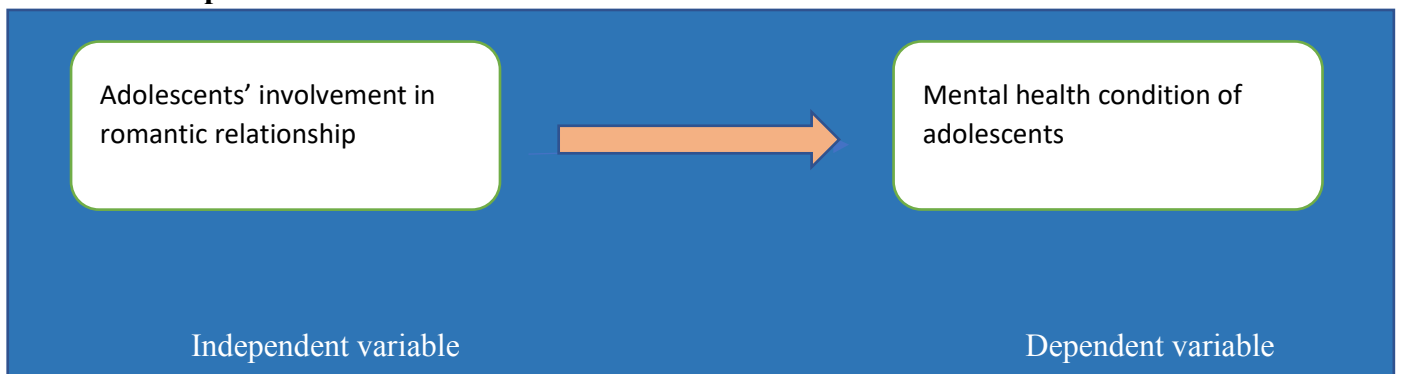


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study

1.7 Significance of Study

- a) This study expanded the scope of knowledge, study and interest of love aspects (positive psychology), adolescence's group age (developmental psychology) and their mental health conditions.
- b) This study enhanced comprehension regarding whether differences in gender influence their psychological well-being when involved in romantic relationship during adolescence.
- c) The research also helped toward better understanding of mental health care especially for adolescence who live in current era which are facing unique level of stress compared with the past centuries due to rapid modernization.

1.8 Definition of Terms

1.8.1 Romantic Relationship

Conceptual Definition: Refers to a relationship involving 2 individuals who considered one another as partner who shared same feeling toward each other especially in terms of love, care and intimacy. Romantic relationship's character is unique intensity, expressions of affection and sexual erotic encounters (Lopez, Viejo & Ruiz, 2019)

Operational Definition: Involvement in romantic relationships were assessed using the result of Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS).

1.8.2 Mental Health

Conceptual Definition: The condition of psychological well-being. According to World Health Organization (n.d) "Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every

individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community”.

Operational Definition: In this study, mental health was assessed using the result of Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21).

1.8.3 Adolescents

Conceptual Definition: According to World Health Organization (n.d) adolescents is the phase of life between childhood and adulthood, from ages 10- 19 years old.

Operational Definition: In this study, adolescents were students from form 1 until upper form 6 in one of the secondary schools in Miri.

1.9 Summary

In this chapter, we covered the background of study, problem statement, research objectives, questions, and hypotheses, the conceptual framework of the study, definitions of terms, and significance of this study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter contain discussion regarding the topic of romantic relationship, mental health issues (specifically among adolescents in Malaysia) and its relations. Next, this chapter discuss theories, models and perspectives related to this topic which are Erik Erikson's Psychosocial stages of development. Past finding journal articles with title 'Well-being and romantic relationships: a systematic review in adolescence and emerging adulthood' and 'Young Love: Romantic concerns and associated mental health issues among adolescent help-seeker' are also being discuss in this chapter.

2.1 Adolescents, mental health and romantic relationships

Adolescence period is a challenging phase for most people as rapid development occurs physically, psychologically and socially during this stage. "Adolescence, as a complex developmental phase with many challenges, is a time of moving or changing from childhood with the immaturity into the adulthood with maturity (Latiffah Latif, Esra Tajik, Normala Ibrahim, Azrin bakar & Shirin Ali, 2017; Schraml,Perski, Grossi, Simonsson, 2011; Steinberg, 2008). There are significant tendencies of adolescents to possess mental health issues during this rapid developmental phase. During development, adolescents negatively experience psychosocial problems (such as depression, stress and anxiety) and behavioral problems (such as poor academic performance or substance abuse) as there are 10-20% psychosocial problem reported among 5.47 million adolescents in Malaysia (Latiffah Latif et al., 2017). One of the potential factors that lead to impairment in term of mental health condition during this

development is involvement in romantic relationship. Higher levels of stress, anxiety and depressive symptoms have been found among adolescents who involved with romantic relationships compared to those who does not (Price, Hides, Cockshaw, Staneva & Stoyanov, 2016; Starr et al., 2012; Davilla, 2008; Nieder & Krenke, 2001; Joyner & Udry, 2000). Based on 4019 record of counselling session by Australian national counselling service, there are 36.8% involved mental health issues which including 22.6% and 9.9% of them related to self-harm and suicidal ideation respectively (Price et al., 2016). Some of events that occur in romantic relationship also exert significance negative impacts toward adolescents. As Price et al. (2016) notes that “Adolescents reporting dissolution stage issues (*i.e.*, breakup-related concerns; problems with the ex-partner), were significantly more likely to present with suicide and/or self-harm issues than those presenting with concerns about other relationship stages”. However, several studies also suggested that romantic relationship is important in adolescence stage as it direct toward a better development. Developing positive self-concept and better social integration are contributed by romantic relationships and emotional bonding experiences (Lopez, Viejo & Ruiz, 2019; Meier & Allen, 2008; Montgomery, 2005). Romantic relationship during adolescence also considered as one of the steps prior to emerging into adulthood. Romantic experiences are frequent during adolescence and tend to be enhanced over time indicating salient learning and training process for future romantic relationship (Conolly, 2009).

2.2 Erik Erikson Psychosocial Development Theory

The most domain and closest model is Erik Erikson psychosocial development stage models. In this model, adolescence is a vital stage for development of identity. Crisis of our basic ego identity must be meet and resolve in adolescence stage which are between 12 and 18 years old (Schultz & Schultz, 2017). If an individual manages to be positively developed during this

stage, he or she able to become more unique and consist strong self-image. As Schultz and Schultz (2017) note that “If this process is resolved satisfactorily, the result is a consistent and congruent picture”. Some studies suggest that romantic relationship have important role in identity development among adolescents. Those studies proposed that with romantic relationship, adolescence with better health physically and psychologically able to be manifested. Romantic relationships that are well established and maintained able to contribute to mental and physical health (DeWall, Maner, Deckman & Ruby, 2011) as it has crucial repercussions in later stages of life (Arnett, Zukaskiene & Sugimura, 2006). However, involvement in romantic relationship also may interrupt the identity development of adolescents as some negative events occur in a romantic relationship able to negatively impact them psychologically and emotionally. As Price et al. (2016) state that “Adolescents with dissolution stage issues (such as break up or problems with ex-partner) were also significantly more likely to present with mental health issues compared to those concerned about establishment stage issues”. Thus, study of relationship between romantic relation and mental health condition needs to be more emphasize especially in Malaysia so that this country’s adolescents able to avoid failure in achieving cohesive identity. This failure called as identity crisis, able to cause those adolescents to face difficulties in term of psychosocial even after adolescence period. Schultz and Schultz (2017) state that “Who experience what Erikson called as identity crisis, will exhibit a confusion of roles. They do not know who or what they are, where they belong. Or where they want to go”.

2.3 Previous Findings

There are 2 journal articles that have similar topic and area of interest with this research. Firstly, journal article with the title of ‘Well-being and romantic relationships: A systematic review in

adolescence and emerging adulthood' by Mercedes Gomez-lopez, Carmen Viejo and Rosario Ortega-Ruiz which was published in 2019. This journal article used meta-analysis method in synthesizing and reviewing systematically a total of 112 studies regarding these topics which were conducted over past 3 decades. The other journal article is 'Young Love: Romantic concerns and associated mental health issues among adolescent help-seeker'. This journal was published online on 6th May 2016 by Megan Price, Leanne Hides, Wendell Cockshaw, Aleksandra A. Staneva and Stoyan R. Stoyanov. This study based on 4019 recorded counselling sessions of adolescents that sought help from Australian National Youth Counselling Services through Kids Helpline (a free hotline which provide 24-7 counselling support funded by Yourtown). Both studies result in significant outcome to show the relationship between romantic relationships and mental health issues. However, ambiguity can be manifested as the studies show contradiction relationship between romantic relations and mental health conditions which either lead to more positive or negative development of adolescents. This ambiguity was clearly depicted in first journal article mentioned above which review 112 studies regarding these topics. Furthermore, this journal article also mentioned that study of romantic relationship in stages prior to adulthood remain relatively insufficient and small in number. Other than that, both journal articles which are based on westerner settings also displayed distinct culture and events in romantic relationships among adolescents compared to eastern countries, specifically Malaysia. Therefore, a study to investigate the relationship between romantic relations and mental health condition among adolescence need to be conduct in Malaysia specifically Miri, Sarawak as those studies in 2 journal articles mentioned earlier are irrelevant to be apply in Malaysia.

2.5 Summary

Past findings, related theory and discussion of issues all shown that there was ambiguity in relationship of romantic relations and mental health condition of adolescents. Firstly, the effect of romantic relationship show ambiguity as there are positive and negative effect of romantic relationship toward mental health condition of adolescents. Then, western's culture of romantic relationship also shown ambiguity as it is absolutely distinct from Malaysian's culture in romantic relationship. This study able to contribute toward enhancing comprehension regarding romantic relationship in eastern culture (Malaysia).

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses research design, population, sample and sampling procedure, instrument and pilot study. Other than that, validity and reliability, ethics applied in this study, data collection and data analysis procedure also included in this chapter.

3.1 Research Design

This research was a correlational quantitative to study romantic relationships and mental health conditions among adolescents. Data collections were conducted through an online survey (questionnaire) and there were few sections to collect data for each variable. The dependent variable for this study is mental health condition among adolescents. Meanwhile, in romantic relationship is the independent variable.

3.2 Population and Sample

This research's population was adolescents within the age range from 13 to 19 years old in Miri, Sarawak. Selected samples were adolescents in one of the selected schools in Miri and successfully collected 109 participants. The sampling procedure was the convenience sampling (non-probability sampling). Questionnaire was distributed with help of school's counselling unit, teachers and students' club through Whatsapp application.