

Emotional Dependence on a Dating Partner from an Early-Adulthood Perspective

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Abstract. *Introduction* Emotional dependence refers to an excessive affective need for a romantic partner as the primary source of security, emotional support, and self-validation.

Aim This qualitative descriptive study explored the characteristics of emotional dependence among young adult dating couples in Kupang City. Six participants with high emotional dependence, identified using the *Cuestionario de Dependencia Emocional* (CDE), were selected through purposive sampling and interviewed using semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed thematically and validated through member checking.

Result Six themes emerged: affective needs toward the partner, fear of loss or separation, perceptions of the partner, sacrifices in the relationship, the relationship's centrality in life, and experiences of conflict and separation threats. Participants viewed their partners as their primary emotional resource, exhibited intense communication needs, prioritized their partners' needs over their own, and experienced emotional distress during conflicts.

Conclusion These findings highlight emotional dependence as a pattern shaping cognition, emotion, and behavior in young adults' romantic relationships.

Introduction

Early adulthood is a developmental period characterized by the formation of more intimate romantic relationships. During this phase, partners often serve as a source of emotional support, a sense of security, and a space for sharing experiences. However, when the need for closeness becomes excessive, individuals may experience emotional dependence—a condition in which the partner becomes the primary source of emotional regulation and self-validation (Castelló, 2005).

Emotional dependence is characterized by a high level of affective need toward a partner, fear of loss, a tendency to prioritize the partner over one's own interests, and difficulty maintaining emotional well-being when the relationship experiences conflict. This condition can increase the risk of remaining in an unhealthy relationship and negatively impact an individual's psychological well-being. Various studies indicate that emotional dependence is associated with insecure attachment, low self-esteem, and violence in romantic relationships.

Furthermore, emotional dependence is an extremely intense emotional need that a person feels toward their partner in the various relationships they engage in. This is the core of the problem: an extreme emotional need for a partner (Blasco, 2005). As a result of this dependence, the victim comes to feel that their world revolves solely around their partner. They view their partner as the only outlet for their emotions and the only person to confide in; thus, unconsciously, over time, they begin to withdraw from the outside world. This occurs because they feel "accepted" and believe there is someone who is always capable of resolving their problems and stabilizing their emotions (Ma'rufa et al., 2025).

This condition indicates a significant gap in how individuals interpret relationships, manage emotions, and position their partners in their lives. Therefore, the phenomenon of emotional dependence in romantic relationships warrants further research to understand the underlying factors and its implications for individuals' emotional and psychological development, particularly during early adulthood. To gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, a theoretical framework is needed that can explain patterns of emotional attachment in interpersonal relationships.

The results of this study indicate that some young adults in Kupang view their partners as the primary source of emotional support, feel anxious when communication is interrupted, and experience fear of losing their partners. Additionally, some participants admitted to being willing to sacrifice their personal needs to maintain the relationship. These findings suggest a tendency toward emotional dependence that requires deeper understanding.

Research on emotional dependency among young adults in Indonesia, particularly in Kupang City, remains limited and has predominantly employed quantitative approaches. Therefore, this study aims to describe the nature of emotional dependency among dating couples from the perspective of young adults in Kupang City using a qualitative approach, thereby providing a deeper understanding of individuals' experiences in romantic relationships.

To this end, the theory deemed relevant to this study is the theory of emotional dependency, which explains that emotional dependency is an extremely intense affective need that a person feels toward their partner in the various relationships they engage in. The core of the issue is the extreme affective need toward a partner. The difference between healthy love and emotional dependence lies in the distinction between wanting a partner (*querer*) and needing a partner (*necesitar*). (Blasco, 2005).

Method

This study employs a qualitative research method. According to Creswell (as cited in Juita, Effendi, & Maryam, 2025), qualitative research explores and interprets the meanings individuals or groups attribute to social or human issues. The data generated consist of texts or narratives that are analyzed thematically using a descriptive qualitative approach. Essentially, descriptive research seeks to describe and interpret something—such as situations and conditions, existing relationships, emerging opinions, resulting consequences or effects, and so on (Rusandi & Rusli, 2021).

The study is located in Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara, and focuses on young adult couples currently in dating relationships. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a technique that selects participants based on specific criteria to ensure that informants were chosen who truly had experiences relevant to the research focus (Sugiyono, 2023). The participant criteria for this study include: (1) being in early adulthood (ages 18–40), (2) currently in a romantic relationship, (3) having an emotional dependence on their partner, (4) residing in Kupang City, and

(5) being willing to participate and openly share their experiences during the interview process.

Before the interview process, the researchers conducted an initial screening using the Cuestionario de Dependencia Emocional (CDE), which consists of 23 items. Based on the scale's interpretation guidelines, individuals with a percentile (PC) ≤ 44 were categorized as having no emotional dependence; those with a PC of 45–85.7 fell into the normal emotional dependence category; and those with a PC ≥ 85.8 were classified as having high emotional dependence. The screening results indicated that 12 individuals fell into the high emotional dependence category. Subsequently, six participants were selected as research informants because they met all inclusion criteria and were willing to participate in in-depth interviews.

Prior to data collection, all participants were briefed on the study's objectives, procedures, benefits, participants' rights, and data confidentiality guarantees, and then expressed willingness to participate by signing an informed consent form. Participants' identities were anonymized using codes, and the research process was conducted voluntarily in accordance with research ethics principles. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. Data validity was ensured through member checking, which involved confirming the interview results and the researcher's interpretations with the participants to ensure they aligned with the experiences the participants described.

Result

This study involved six early-adult participants selected using purposive sampling. All participants met the study criteria and were classified as having high emotional dependence based on the results of a screening using the Cuestionario de Dependencia Emocional (CDE). The participants' characteristics are presented in the table below.

Table 1.
Participants' Characteristics

Initials	Age	Gender	Relationship Status	Duration of the Relationship
AL	21 Years	Female	Dating	11 Month
NH	22 Years	Female	Dating	4 Years
CH	22 Years	Male	Dating	7 Years
FR	23 Years	Female	Dating	2 Years
TS	23 Years	Female	Dating	4 Years
SR	25 Years	Male	Dating	9 Years

The results of the analysis reveal several key themes that emerged from the participants' experiences. These themes illustrate how participants perceive their relationships with their partners, the forms of dependence they experience, the factors that influence the development of emotional dependence, and the impacts they feel in their daily lives.

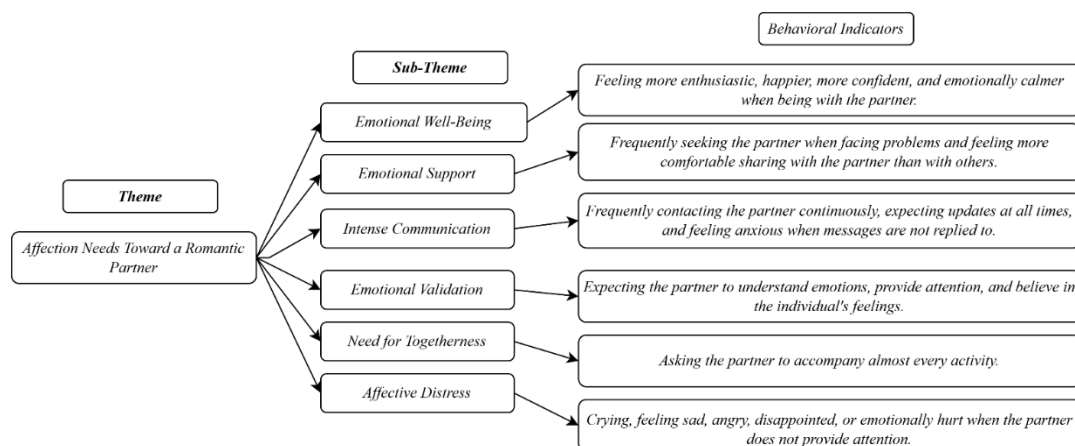


Figure 1. Theme I

1. Affective Needs Toward a Romantic Partner

The results of the data analysis show that all participants have strong affective needs toward their partners. These affective needs are demonstrated not only through the desire to receive affection, attention, and emotional support but also through the expectation that their partner will always be present, provide a sense of security, and serve as the primary person with whom to share experiences and problems.

Based on these results, the theme of emotional needs toward a partner consists of six subthemes, namely:

a. Emotional Well-Being

"It seems like ever since I've had a boyfriend, I've been more enthusiastic about doing things—I'm more eager to go out, socialize, and... well, what else? My days just don't feel so monotonous anymore. I'm just more excited because I have someone supporting me every day." (informant AL)

These findings indicate that the presence of a partner holds great emotional significance for the participants. Partners are viewed as figures capable of providing a sense of security, happiness, support, and encouragement in their daily lives.

b. Emotional Support

".....Every person needs a place to share their story—not some exciting tale, but more like a life update. So, to prove to the world that they exist, people usually need a place like that. For example, when I have life updates like this and that, the best place for that is usually my partner..... Because there's no one in this world you can trust more than your partner." (informant SR)

These findings suggest that participants' need for emotional support is directed more toward their partners than toward other people. Participants tend to rely on their partners as their primary source for sharing experiences, receiving encouragement, and finding comfort.

c. Intense Communication

".....Even if it's just through my phone, I want my partner to always be there and reply to my messages without a long delay.Because I'm the type of partner who needs to communicate constantly—at the very least, when we're chatting, it's like... if I send a message, you have to reply within five minutes at the latest, especially when you're not doing anything else—that's how I feel.... Opening your phone and typing a few messages doesn't take that long, and that's really hard—it's still hard even now—maybe because we're dependent on our partner, so that sense of need is very high because of that" (informant FR)

The findings indicate that participants have a strong need for communication with their partners as a means of achieving a sense of security and emotional closeness. This suggests that communication has become one of the primary sources for fulfilling the participants' affective needs, and thus the intensity of communication significantly influences their emotional state.

d. Emotional Validation

".....In my opinion, no matter how small our partner's response may be, it's a sign of how they value and acknowledge our existence, so whatever their response is, I can use it to reassess and reevaluate whether they value me and acknowledge my existence or not." (Informant FR)

The study's findings indicate that a partner's attention and emotional validation play a significant role in meeting participants' emotional needs. Participants tend to associate their partners' attention with feeling loved, valued, and accepted in the relationship. Conversely, a decrease in attention or a lack of validation of their feelings triggers various negative emotional reactions that influence how participants view their relationship with their partner.

e. Need for Togetherness

".....I realized that it was actually a dependent feeling because, to be honest, I became too lazy to do anything—I even reached a point where I was too lazy to eat unless I was told to or someone brought me food. So I'd wait until he came to bring me a meal or until we cooked together before I'd eat. I often use my partner as a factor in making decisions about my life—like when I'm deciding whether to participate in an activity, I consider whether he agrees or not; if there's a good chance he'll agree, then I'll do it.Being allowed to do that means I have to set boundaries." (Informant FR)

The research findings indicate that a partner's involvement in daily activities and decision-making processes has become an integral part of the participants' lives. This pattern means that the presence of a partner has a significant impact on the participants' ability to carry out activities and make decisions independently.

f. Affective Distress

".....Maybe I'm feeling a mix of sadness and anger. Sad because when I'm feeling down, no one is there to listen, and angry because he should be the one I can turn to for support. If he doesn't give me attention, first, I feel like he doesn't love me anymore; second, I feel like someone else has taken my place—maybe he's met someone else; and third, I feel like I'm simply not worthy of that love." (Informant AL)

The research findings indicate that the unmet affective needs of partners are a primary source of emotional distress among participants. When

partners fail to provide the attention, support, communication, or presence that participants expect, they exhibit a range of emotional responses, such as sadness, anxiety, anger, and feelings of insecurity, as well as negative thoughts about the relationship and themselves.

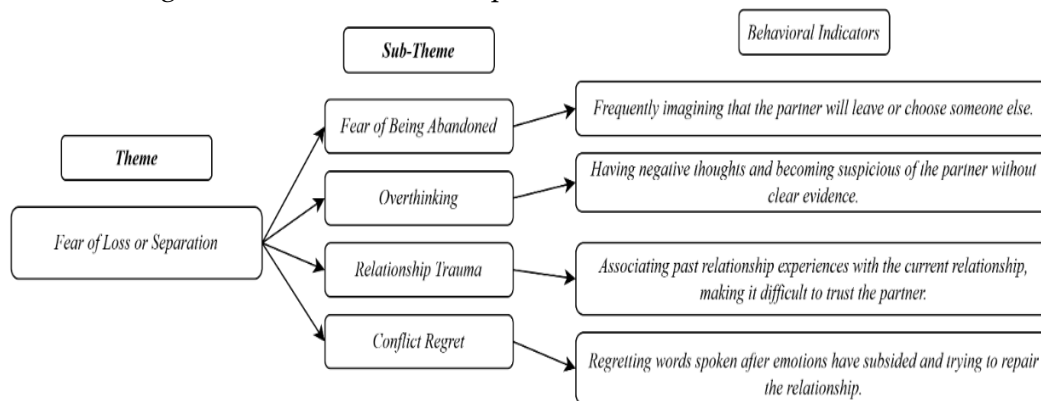


Figure 2. Theme II

2. Fear of Loss or Separation

The results of the data analysis show that fear of loss or separation is an emotional experience shared by all participants in their romantic relationships. This fear arises when participants face situations perceived as potentially threatening to the relationship's continuity, such as conflict, changes in their partner's attitude, a decline in communication, or the possibility of the relationship ending.

Based on the analysis results, the theme of fear of loss or separation consists of several subthemes that describe the participants' experiences when facing threats to their relationships, namely :

a. Fear of being abandoned

"I'm afraid that, say, he might... I mean, he's busy, and on top of that, we're in a long-distance relationship, right? Plus, a lot of people say that guys tend to choose a woman who's close by over one who's far away. I'm even more afraid that he might fall for a coworker, or someone from his hometown, or someone from his area, you know? All this time, I've been afraid of losing him because I feel like no one would want me since I'm already 'damaged'" (informant TS)

The fear of being abandoned is influenced by one's self-perception—such as feeling inadequate, worrying that one's partner will find someone else

who is considered better, or fearing that one's partner will become close to someone else.

b. Overthinking

".....That's what sometimes makes me worry—what if he gets tired of me, then meets someone else, and ends up leaving me? Or, since he's so busy participating in all those activities, I'm afraid that if he keeps going to them, he'll meet someone who is prettier, better, and in every way superior to me, and then he'll leave me." (Informant AL)

Overthinking and suspicion emerged as participants' responses when faced with situations perceived as threatening their relationship with their partner. Overthinking and suspicion not only influence how participants interpret their partner's behavior but also trigger anxiety, conflict, and a need for reassurance regarding their partner's commitment and feelings toward the relationship.

c. Relationship Trauma

".....I've had trust issues with my partner for a long time because, before I was with my current partner, I've been cheated on before—not just once, but pretty much every time I've broken up with a partner, it's been because they cheated on me. So I'm always on my guard and watchful of that kind of situation, so I feel like, damn, if you don't reply to my messages, it means you're cheating—because I've been through that before, where my partner wouldn't reply to my messages and it turned out they were cheating. So now I feel like, 'Wow, if you don't reply to my messages, it means you're cheating.'" (informant FR)

Negative experiences from previous relationships, as well as experiences of being betrayed by a partner in their current relationship, have left an emotional impact that participants still feel. These experiences have made participants more cautious about entering into relationships, made it difficult for them to trust their partners fully, and left them with a lingering fear that the same experiences might happen again.

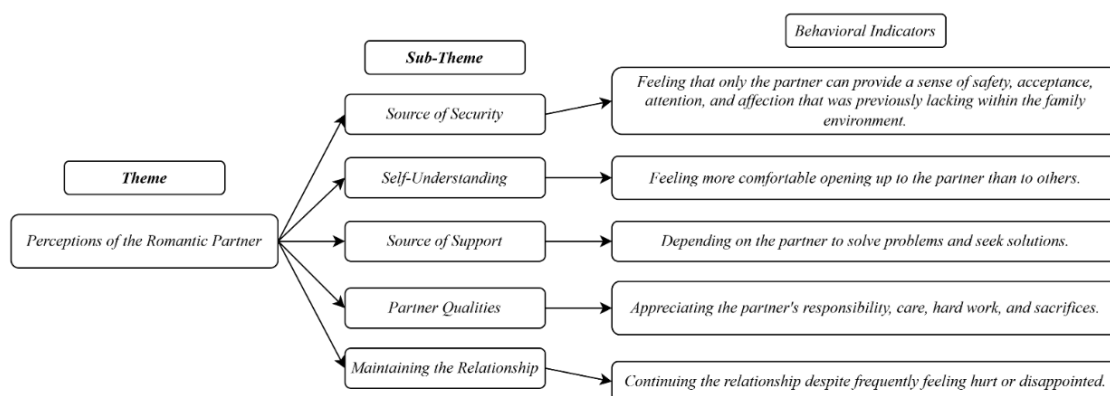


Figure 3. Theme III

3. Perception of the Romantic Partner

The interview results show that participants' views of their partners are shaped by various experiences they've had throughout their relationships. Partners are not only viewed as individuals with whom they share a romantic relationship, but also as figures who provide a sense of security, understand them deeply, and serve as a source of help and support when facing various difficulties. Based on the analysis, this theme consists of several subthemes, namely

a. Source of Security

"When I was having an argument at home... he often listened to what I had to say, and then he'd respond within a fraction of a second, so I felt calmer" (informant NH)

The findings indicate that participants view their partners as the primary source of emotional security. Their partners' presence, willingness to listen, and responses when participants face difficulties make them feel calmer, more accepted, and more protected

b. Self-Understanding

"....But with him, I feel like he always listens to me, and when I need help, whether he can or can't, he still makes an effort to help me. And I feel like he's the one who understands me best, more than anyone else." (Informant AL)

The findings indicate that participants view their partners as the people who understand them best, compared to others. This understanding is reflected in their partners' ability to listen to their stories, understand their emotional state, and respond in ways that meet the participants' needs.

c. Source of Support

"It was an experience when I really felt I needed my partner—when I was sick and hospitalized with a stomach ailment, and since I was far from my parents, I really needed my partner—because I felt that when I was with my partner, they already knew what I needed without me having to explain it. My partner knew that at that time I could only eat chicken porridge, or even take the medications I often took when I was sick." (Informant FR)

The findings indicate that participants view their partners as a source of support that plays a crucial role in meeting their various needs. The support provided takes the form not only of practical assistance but also includes help in resolving problems and offering solutions when participants face difficulties.

d. Partner's Qualities

"he's a hard worker. You know, kids these days—usually, when they want to make money, they're too proud to take just any job. But he—as long as he has the chance—takes on any job that comes his way. Like driving for Grab, running a shoe-cleaning business, and so on. That's what I admire" (informant AL)

The findings indicate that participants admire various positive qualities in their partners, such as responsibility, hard work, patience, caring, and commitment to the relationship. These positive assessments of their partners' character and behavior lead participants to value their partners more and strengthen their emotional bond within the relationship.

e. Maintaining the Relationships

"Because we want to live together—maybe because he complements me, is understanding, and is very supportive in every way, and he's also able to control himself—and because of his mindset as well" (informant SR)

That decision is based on an assessment of the quality of the relationship—factors considered valuable, such as a sense of comfort, commitment, the couple's efforts to maintain the relationship, and the belief that the partner is capable of meeting their emotional needs.

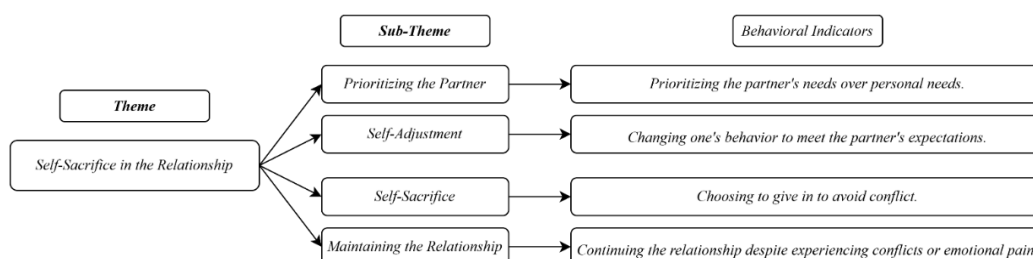


Figure 4. Theme IV

4. Self-Sacrifice in the Relationships

The research findings indicate that sacrifice in relationships manifests through various forms of behavior that reflect participants' efforts to maintain the relationship with their partner. This sacrifice is evident in the tendency to prioritize the partner's needs and interests over one's own, the willingness to set aside time and adjust activities for the partner, making adjustments to the partner's needs and expectations, and choosing to yield when faced with differences or conflicts. Based on the analysis, this theme consists of several subthemes, namely

a. Prioritizing the Partner

"For example, if I have to take care of my own business, and then suddenly he needs someone to accompany him, I usually put my own business aside and decide to go with him. He still puts my needs first." (Informant AL)

The findings indicate that participants tend to prioritize their partners in various situations by placing their partners' needs, desires, and interests above their own. This tendency is evident in the participants' willingness to put their partners first when making choices, to pay greater attention to their partners' needs, and to consider their partners' comfort in every decision they make.

b. Self-Adjustment

"The reason is that I want to make a good impression on my partner" (informant FR)

The research findings indicate that participants engaged in various forms of self-adjustment in an effort to maintain their relationships with their partners. These adjustments were evident in the participants' willingness to change their behavior, habits, preferences, and ways of responding to

situations to better align with their partners' needs, expectations, and circumstances.

c. Self Sacrifice

".....I'd rather just leave and give him the silent treatment than wear myself out and hurt him" (informant NH)

The study's findings indicate that participants are willing to compromise in various situations as a way to maintain their relationships with their partners. This willingness to compromise is evident in the participants' willingness to control their emotions, tone down their desire to defend their opinions, and choose to defuse conflicts in order to foster a more harmonious relationship.

d. Maintaining the Relationship

"He always goes out of his way for me and has no intention of cheating on me like that, so that's why I've stayed with him." (Informant AL)

The study's findings indicate that participants were committed to maintaining their relationships despite facing various challenges, such as conflicts, differences of opinion, and experiences that caused disappointment. Their decision to stay was based on the meaning participants attributed to their relationships and partners, such as a sense of comfort, acceptance, support, and hope for a shared future.

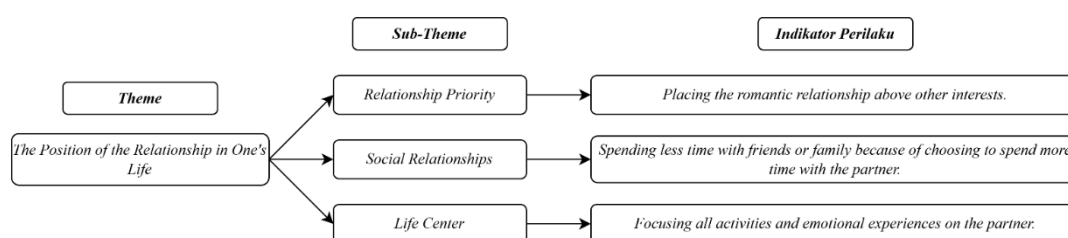


Figure 5. Theme V

5. The Position of the Relationship in One's Life

The research findings indicate that relationships with partners play a very important role in the participants' lives. These relationships are not only a priority in decision-making and the organization of daily activities, but also influence how participants interact with their social environment. Based on the analysis, this theme consists of several subthemes, namely

a. Relationships Priority

"It's very important because I'm quite forward-thinking when it comes to my relationship." (informant FR)

The research findings indicate that participants view their relationship with their partner as one of the most important aspects of their lives. This is reflected in the participants' tendency to prioritize the needs, interests, and continuity of the relationship over their personal interests or other activities

b. Social Relationships

"That's only natural, really. Because when I was going through a tough time, my partner was the only one there for me. I didn't have any friends... some of them even distanced themselves from me and thought I wasn't fun anymore..." (informant SR)

Research findings indicate that relationships with partners also influence participants' social relationships with those around them. Romantic relationships not only impact participants' personal lives but also play a role in shaping the quality and patterns of their social relationships

c. Life Center

".....I made him my everything—he had to be my teacher, he had to be everything to me. Whatever I asked, whatever information I needed, I expected him to know, and if he didn't, I'd get angry. So he'd always try to look it up on Google to answer me" (informant NH)

The research findings indicate that partners play a central role in the participants' lives. This is reflected in the participants' tendency to view their partners as the primary source for fulfilling their emotional needs, receiving support, sharing experiences, and as a key consideration in various decisions and daily activities

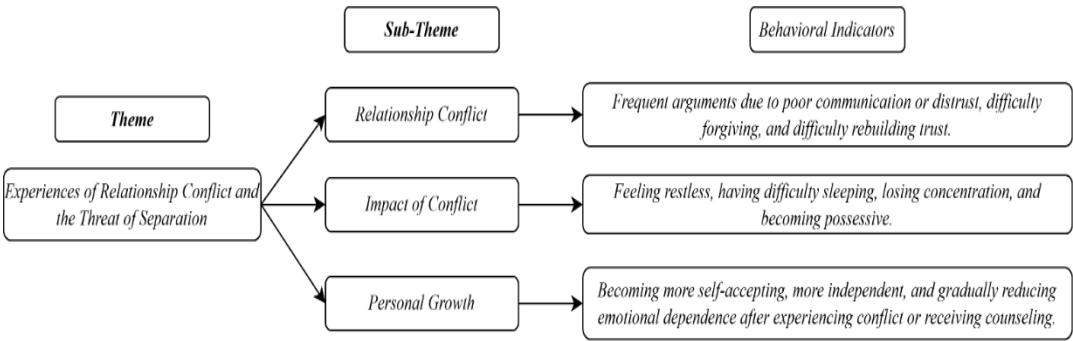


Figure 6. Theme VI

6. Experiences of Relationship Conflict and the Threat of Separation

Research findings indicate that conflict and the threat of breakup are experiences that shape the dynamics of the participants' relationships with their partners. Conflict generally arises from communication problems, a decline in trust, and experiences of infidelity, which trigger various emotional reactions and test the sustainability of the relationship. Participants also experienced changes in themselves and their relationships, such as improved emotional regulation, behavioral improvements, the development of more open communication, and a better understanding of their relationships. Based on the analysis, this theme consists of several subthemes, namely:

a. Relationship Conflict

"Half an hour is still tolerable, but after that I usually get angry right away—I'll ask where you are, or start bombarding you with calls... That's just my personality: if I'm going to do something, I need to be told. Even if you're just going to eat, you have to let me know—because letting your partner know takes less than five seconds. I can even understand a voice note." (Informant FR)

The research findings indicate that conflicts in the participants' relationships are influenced by various factors, particularly communication problems, a decline in trust, and experiences of infidelity. Barriers to communication lead to misunderstandings, feelings of not being understood, and difficulties in resolving problems that arise

b. Impact of Conflict

"It really affected me, I think... especially during those times when we had intense arguments... There were times when I was at my internship, and it really affected my mood there. My internship friends would talk, but I'd just stay silent. I stayed quiet most of the time because I wasn't in a good place mentally. It was the same at work. When we were fighting, I felt really sad, and when someone ordered food or drinks, I'd sometimes go to the restroom to cry while I was preparing their order. After that, I'd calm myself down, go back out, and then go back in to cry again. It went on like that." (informant FR)

Research findings indicate that conflict in relationships has a significant impact on participants' lives. This impact is not only felt on an emotional level—such as through feelings of sadness, anxiety, overthinking, anger, or a loss of motivation—but also affects daily activities, including

concentration, productivity, eating habits, sleep patterns, social interactions, and the fulfillment of responsibilities.

c. Personal Growth

".....finally, I decided to work on myself so I wouldn't be left behind because of my shortcomings. For example, seeing a psychologist so I can improve even more....."
(informant AL)

The study's findings indicate that experiences of conflict and the threat of separation prompt changes in the participants. These changes are reflected in their efforts to evaluate themselves, correct behaviors perceived as causing conflict, improve their ability to manage emotions, and establish more open patterns of communication with their partners.

Discussion

This study shows that emotional dependence among young adults in romantic relationships is a multifaceted experience that influences various aspects of the participants' lives. The analysis yielded six interrelated main themes: affective needs toward the partner, fear of loss or separation, perceptions of the partner, sacrifices made in the relationship, the relationship's place in life, and experiences of conflict and the threat of separation. These six themes illustrate that partners have become central figures in the participants' lives—as sources of affection, a sense of security, and emotional support, as well as the foundation for decision-making and the organization of daily activities.

The emotional dependence experienced by participants can be understood from the perspective of early adulthood. According to Hurlock (cited in Siby & Joesoef, 2022), early adulthood is a period of seeking stability marked by various developmental tasks, such as choosing a life partner, building intimate relationships, and preparing for family life. At this stage of development, romantic relationships become a crucial aspect of an individual's life, serving as a means to fulfill the need for emotional closeness and commitment. This pattern aligns with the characteristics of emotional dependence described by Castelló (2005), suggesting that for the

participants in this study, the developmental task of forming intimate relationships has evolved into maladaptive emotional dependence.

The results of this study revealed several differences in the emotional dependence experienced by each participant. Starting with participant AL, who experienced emotional dependence on her partner. This was evidenced by the results of the interviews conducted. She said that because she was so dependent on her partner, her fear of losing him was immense. This led her to want to participate in whatever activities her partner engaged in—even work. Not only that, but she demanded constant communication. Whatever her partner did, she had to be kept informed at all times. The underlying factor behind AL's emotional dependence was the long-standing, intense communication that had existed even before they began dating. In the past, she had often been cheated on, which made her feel inadequate. She was even willing to seek help from a professional—in this case, a psychologist—in the hope of finding a solution to organize her life better, so her partner could accept her, as she is very dependent on him but afraid of being abandoned.

Next is participant NH, who experiences emotional dependence on her partner because they spend a great deal of time together over a long period. Whenever there is a family problem, she turns only to her partner as someone to confide in. Her partner always served as a sounding board for her grievances and a good advisor. This made NH feel she needed her partner and eventually led to emotional dependence that affected her daily activities and mood. Next is the experience of participant CH. CH developed emotional dependence on her partner after experiencing a tragedy that resulted in her being abandoned by friends and family. This led the participant to feel that only their partner could be relied upon eventually.

Next is participant FR, who developed emotional dependence due to their partner's habit of always offering to be present for every activity the participant undertook, no matter what it was. Compounding this was the fact that the participant was far from their parents, and only their partner was consistently there to do

everything for them. This ultimately led to the participant's emotional dependence on their partner, which in turn shaped their psychological state and daily activities. The participant stated that they were even willing to go to their partner's house at 4:00 a.m. simply because they had been arguing and the partner was not replying to their messages. The participant wanted to make sure their relationship was okay.

Next, the emotional dependence experienced by TS. TS's extreme dependence on her partner stemmed from a difficult background. She was a child from a broken home who entered into a relationship with a man she considered kind—a man willing to accept her background, act as her shield during conflicts with her family, and be ready to help and accompany her every day while she was away from home. This is what eventually led the participant to become completely dependent on her partner.

When they eventually had to maintain a long-distance relationship and found it difficult to communicate, the participant felt anxious and afraid of losing him, to the point where she was willing to track her partner through his Google account and contact all of his closest friends just to get news—such was the extent of her dependence. Moreover, according to the participant's admission, they had engaged in intimate relations. The final case involves SR. SR developed an emotional dependence on their partner due to a toxic social circle. They felt exploited by their friends, leading them to believe that only their partner could be relied upon. They placed great trust in their partner because the partner consistently offered new, positive perspectives that helped SR grow and become a better person.

The primary factor underlying the development of emotional dependence in early adulthood, as demonstrated by the six participants, was a lack of affection during early life, consistent with Castello's (2005) categorization of factors causing emotional dependence. This is because all six participants were described as having experienced a lack of sufficient affection, acceptance, or attention.

Based on the findings presented under these six themes, it is evident that the emotional dependence experienced by male and female participants in early-

adulthood romantic relationships differs. Male participants tended to exhibit emotional dependence that led to healthy dependence, whereas female participants tended to exhibit pathological dependence. This is because female participants' emotional dependence manifests through more intense emotional responses when facing conflicts with their partners, such as deep sadness, anger, anxiety, and behaviors that lead to self-harm.

One participant revealed that when experiencing conflict with her partner, she felt so sad and angry that she pounded her own chest as a way to vent her emotions. Meanwhile, male participants were said to experience healthy emotional dependence because, as men, they naturally find it harder than women to express their feelings. They tend to be calmer, so the likelihood of overthinking, self-harm, and so on is very low. "Healthy" here means that they still maintain their sense of self and are able to preserve their emotional independence. In line with the research findings, both male participants explained that emotional dependence on their partners actually led them to adopt a more up-to-date, modern, and future-oriented perspective.

The factors influencing the development of emotional dependence actually stem from several factors, such as age and the duration of the relationship. The factors observed in the six participants in this study were age and the duration of the relationship. Let's start with age. This study focuses on early adulthood. As is well known, early adulthood is a period of seeking stability and a reproductive phase—a time filled with problems and emotional tension, periods of social isolation, periods of commitment, and phases of dependence, shifting values, creativity, and adaptation to a new lifestyle.

Early adulthood is described as a difficult and problematic period because individuals must adapt to their new lives and roles (cited from Siby & Joesoef, 2022). This is what contributes to the emotional dependence experienced by the participants. Most participants need someone who can listen, offer advice, and validate their feelings amid the immense pressures of life's many challenges, and most partners are

able to provide this. Due to intense communication and consistently kept promises to meet, a close bond is formed. This is what leads to the development of emotional dependence on a partner.

Furthermore, the duration of the relationship also contributes to the development of emotional dependence. Several participants noted that the length of the relationship influences emotional dependence on their partner. Given the duration of the relationship, both families have come to know one another well, and the couple has accumulated many shared memories and experiences. If they were to break up, they would have to find a new partner, introduce them to habits the other person does not yet know, and so on. However, this is not the primary factor in the development of emotional dependence among young adults in relationships. Some people are in relatively new relationships but exhibit more severe dependence than those who have been dating for a long time. Ultimately, this factor remains significant.

Based on the research findings, most participants viewed their partners as their primary source of emotional support, a sense of security, self-validation, and a confidant with whom to share various problems. This situation led to high affective needs, a fear of losing their partner, and a tendency to sacrifice personal interests to maintain the relationship. Therefore, to develop emotional independence, participants need to begin building the ability to manage their emotions independently, increase self-esteem, expand sources of social support through family and friends, continue pursuing personal activities, and establish healthy boundaries within the relationship. In this way, the partner remains an important figure but is not the sole source of happiness and emotional stability.

If participants choose to remain in a relationship despite negative consequences, that decision is a personal right and choice that must be respected. However, based on research findings, the decision to stay is often influenced by excessive emotional needs, fear of losing a partner, and a tendency to view the partner as the sole source of security. In such circumstances, what needs to be changed is not

merely the decision to stay or end the relationship, but rather the dynamics of the relationship itself.

If participants still choose to stay, the relationship needs to be steered toward greater health through open communication, the ability to resolve conflicts constructively, respect for each other's boundaries, and the development of emotional independence. In this way, individuals can maintain the relationship based on healthy commitment and affection, rather than out of fear of being abandoned or the belief that they cannot live without their partner. These findings align with Castelló's (2005) theory, which explains that the primary characteristic of emotional dependence does not lie in the decision to stay with a partner, but rather in extreme affective needs that cause individuals to maintain the relationship even at the expense of their psychological well-being.

Conclusion

Emotional dependence among young adults in romantic relationships in Kupang is manifested through a very strong attachment to their partners, with the partner serving as the primary source of security, comfort, and fulfillment of emotional needs. The presence of a partner has a significant impact on an individual's psychological well-being, making attention, communication, and closeness with the partner essential aspects of daily life. Individuals tend to expect a high level of emotional involvement from their partners and feel more at ease when they receive reassurance regarding their partner's feelings, commitment, and presence within the relationship. This attachment makes romantic relationships hold a very important position and serves as one of the most influential factors affecting an individual's emotional well-being.

Strong attachment to a partner is also evident in the emergence of feelings of anxiety, fear of loss, and excessive worry when the relationship faces conflict or when there is a possibility of its end. An individual's emotional state becomes highly volatile in response to the dynamics of the relationship, so that problems arising within the relationship often cause profound emotional distress. In some situations,

individuals show a tendency to maintain the relationship despite facing various difficulties due to the fear of losing someone they consider important in their lives. These findings indicate that the need for closeness, attention, and acceptance from a partner is a highly dominant factor; thus, romantic relationships not only serve as a source of emotional support but also act as a primary determinant in shaping an individual's sense of security, happiness, and emotional stability.

Suggestion

Young adults in romantic relationships are encouraged to build healthy relationships by maintaining a balance between emotional closeness and personal independence. Individuals need to develop the ability to manage their emotions, maintain their sense of self, and avoid relying on their partner as their sole source of happiness and security. In this way, the relationship can provide emotional support without leading to excessive dependence.

Furthermore, parents are encouraged to build a warm relationship with their children through open communication, consistent affection, and adequate emotional support from an early age. Although they face various challenges in family life, parents' presence as figures who are responsive to their children's emotional needs continues to play a vital role in helping children develop a sense of security, positive self-esteem, and emotional independence. Thus, upon entering adulthood and forming romantic relationships, individuals are expected to be able to build healthy relationships without relying excessively on their partner as the sole source of fulfillment for their emotional needs.

Finally, future researchers are encouraged to conduct studies on emotional dependence involving a larger number of participants with more diverse characteristics. In addition, future research could examine factors related to emotional dependence, such as attachment styles, self-esteem, previous relationship experiences, and family dynamics, to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that influence the emergence of emotional dependence in romantic relationships.

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Author Contribution

SAP served as the lead author and led the entire research process, from defining the study's topic and focus to developing the research design, collecting and analyzing data, interpreting results, drafting the discussion and conclusions, and completing the final manuscript. MYCM served as the primary advisor, providing direction, guidance, and oversight of the entire research and writing process—from ensuring the title aligns with the research problem, drafting the background, verifying the accuracy of the research questions and objectives, establishing the theoretical framework, ensuring the methods align with the research focus, to writing the results, discussion, and conclusions.

FR provided guidance and feedback on the manuscript structure and suggested additions and revisions to refine the research content. PCW served as an examiner, providing evaluations, feedback, and suggestions on the entire research content, helping the researcher clarify and strengthen the substance of the research, and offering guidance on making improvements and refinements to the study.

Competing Interest

The author declares that there are no competing interests that could influence the objectivity of the research and the preparation of this article.

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