

The role of duration of dating on anxiety and commitment in early adulthood

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the role of the duration of dating on anxiety and commitment in early adulthood. The study involved 172 early adults (aged 20-30 years) who are currently in romantic relationships, selected using a purposive sampling technique. The research instruments included the anxiety scale and commitment scale, based on previous theoretical aspects. Data analysis was conducted using Two Way ANOVA with JAMOV software to examine the role of the duration of dating on anxiety and commitment. The results of the study showed that there was no significant role of the duration of dating on anxiety and commitment. The study also examined the relationship between the duration of dating and several demographic variables such as gender, occupation, and long-distance relationship (LDR), but no significant effects were found. Therefore, it can be concluded that the duration of dating, whether long or short, does not play a role in the anxiety and commitment of couples in maintaining romantic relationships at a more serious level, such as marriage. The duration of dating was found to be unable to predict anxiety and commitment in relationships. Other variables related to dating, such as relationship quality, satisfaction, and personal factors, are considered to be more involved in predicting anxiety and commitment in dating relationships. This study has practical implications as a reference in premarital counseling and couples therapy to understand the dynamics of romantic dating relationships in individuals.

Keywords

Anxiety, commitment, duration of dating, early adulthood

Introduction

Individuals in their early twenties are considered ready to engage in intimate relationships with the opposite sex. This phenomenon is consistent with previous findings that one of the developmental goals during early adulthood is the need for closeness, identity, and autonomy (Santrock, 2012). Early adulthood, which spans from ages 20 to 40, is recognized as one of the longest developmental periods in human life (Lavner et al., 2016). Human development is inseparable from interpersonal relationships, which can be realized through romantic relationships. Various benefits can be experienced by individuals through healthy romantic relationships, such as improved achievements, enhanced social interactions with others, effective emotional regulation, increased affectionate connections, as well as increased mutual respect and appreciation (Qiem, 2015).

One of the efforts individuals make in building romantic relationships is dating. Dating is an intense romantic relationship between individuals of different genders who accept each other as partners and experience mutual affection (Mulamawitri, 2003). Dating offers various benefits, such as providing a platform to get to know the opposite sex and creating comfort (Duvall & Miller, 1985). Additionally, the psychological impacts of a healthy relationship in dating are reducing the risk of mental disorders, alleviating stress, relieving physical pain, and promoting overall happiness (Iriani & Ninawati, 2005). Dating also aims to provide entertainment, foster friendships, socialize, achieve social status, and choose partners (Oliver, 2020). As dating can

create enjoyment in the relationship, such as going out for dinner or simply taking a walk together, dating can also lead to recreation. Dating is often used as a selection process to find a compatible life partner.

Uncertainty in relationships during early adulthood has an impact on the stability of dating couples. During early adulthood, individuals start to feel pressured to build serious relationships (Price et al., 2016). As a result, individuals in a dating relationship tend to experience anxiety when their partner is temporarily absent from the relationship (Monin et al., 2010). Dating relationships with low levels of commitment often come to an end (Kim & Auh, 2019). Heartbreak is one of the risks associated with dating (Rhoades et al., 2011). The end of a romantic relationship can affect the development of an individual. However, individuals who have been in long-term relationships, experienced love, and faced greater difficulties will have cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses (Synder, 2000). After a breakup, individuals may experience negative emotions such as sadness, anger, pain, post-traumatic stress disorder, frustration, hatred, loneliness, despair, and lower life satisfaction (Sbarra & Emery, 2005).

Breaking up is a possibility in dating relationships. There are several descriptions of the main stages of a breakup (Rollie

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& Duck, 2006). The initial stage is the personal stage, where one party feels unhappy, disappointed, angry, and frustrated. The unhappy individual then expresses their dissatisfaction in the following stage known as the dyadic stage. This stage involves conversations, arguments, and attempts to resolve the dissatisfaction of one party, sometimes followed by surprises, grief, and occasionally a sense of relief. When the relationship is on the verge of ending, both partners enter the social stage where they start talking to their friends and family about their relationship issues to seek support. The final process following a breakup is the self-recovery stage, where an individual begins to narrate their story or modify their own memories to cope with the loss. According to previous research, an individual's reaction to a breakup depends on several factors, including the level of separation, duration of the relationship, nature of the relationship, and the level of expectation regarding the separation (Sbarra, 2006).

The duration of dating is a determining factor in romantic relationships as it influences the quality of the relationship, which in turn affects individuals' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral characteristics (Angela & Ariela, 2021). According to several studies, there are two types of romantic relationships: short-term and long-term (Furman & Shaffer, 2003). Long-term romantic relationships are defined as relationships that last for more than one year, while short-term ones are less than one year (Hadi & Magistarina, 2022). Previous research indicates that individuals in short-term romantic relationships have better psychological well-being and a lower tendency to experience negative effects when losing a partner, whereas individuals in long-term romantic relationships tend to experience deeper love and greater sadness upon separation (Surra et al., 1999). However, other studies suggest that factors such as mental health, happiness, and the duration of the relationship are not always influenced by these factors (Chen et al., 2022; VanLaningham et al., 2001; Zimmer-Gembeck & Collins, 2001). It is known that other elements also play a role in the duration of a relationship and may not have a significant impact on it.

Anxiety usually exists during the preparation stages before someone takes a major step in a relationship such as marriage. Relationship anxiety refers to the emotional response or discomfort experienced by an individual when they are separated from their partner or uncertain of the serious relationship they are involved in (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). The duration of dating takes part in causing relationship anxiety (Collins & Read, 1990). This occurs because individuals who feel insecure in their premarital bond may have a fear of losing their partner (Joshalloo, 2018). The escalation of these concerns can affect the happiness and communication between partners, which in turn impacts the duration of the relationship (Grupe & Nitschke, 2013).

Commitment is another element that affects an individual's readiness for marriage. It comes in the form of one's intention to enter and maintain a serious relationship (Lund, 1985). The quality of the relationship, communication, loyalty, feelings of love, and cultural factors influence a person's commitment to the relationship (Lund, 1985; Rusbult & Martz, 1995; Stanford & Canary, 1991; Brody, 2013). Previous research found a correlation between the duration of dating and commitment (Stanley et al., 2010). Compared to individuals in short-term romantic relationships, those in the long term

tend to display higher levels of commitment. This is most likely because they are more adept at resolving issues in the relationship due to their experience in handling challenges (Morse & Neuberg, 2004; Rhoades et al., 2011). However, there is not any study that analyzes a significant relationship between the duration of dating and commitment (Rhoades et al., 2010); Stanley & Markman (1992) possibly due to the influence of other factors such as relationship quality, values, and other individual characteristics that have a greater impact than the duration of dating (Rhoades et al., 2010).

Based on the explanation above, the objective of this study is to investigate the role of dating duration on anxiety and commitment. Given that the dating duration is not independent of other factors, demographic characteristics are used in this study to bind it as another contributing factor. Therefore, this study aims to examine the role of dating duration on anxiety and commitment in early adulthood, as well as the role of dating duration and demographic factors on anxiety and commitment in early adulthood.

Method

Participants

The study participants consisted of 172 individuals in early adulthood aged 20-30 years who are currently in a dating relationship ($M=23.285$, $SD=2.11$). The sampling technique used in this study is purposive sampling, where the research sample is determined based on pre-established criteria. The majority of participants were females, accounting for 121 individuals (70.3%), while the remaining were males. Among the participants, 89 individuals (51.7%) were employed. The majority of participants had been in a relationship for more than 1 year, with 124 individuals (72.1%) included in this category, and 86 individuals (50%) were in a long-distance relationship (LDR). The majority of participants identified themselves as Muslims (95.3%) and had Javanese cultural backgrounds (83.1%). Data collection was conducted through online questionnaire distribution using the WhatsApp application, after obtaining informed consent from potential participants who met the criteria of being in early adulthood, between 20 and 30 years old, and currently being in a romantic relationship.

Research Instruments

The level of anxiety was measured using the anxiety subscale of the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) scale (Fraley et al., 2000). This subscale aimed to assess the anxiety experienced in relationships. The anxiety subscale consisted of eighteen items. It is a unidimensional scale utilizing a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). A higher anxiety score indicates a higher level of relationship anxiety. Example item statements include "I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me." The reliability score for the anxiety scale was 0.887.

The level of commitment was measured by the commitment scale in romantic relationships (Lund, 1985). This scale aimed to assess the level of commitment. The commitment scale comprised nine items. It is a unidimensional scale employing a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). A higher commitment score indicates

a higher level of relationship commitment. Example item statements include “How likely is it that your relationship will be permanent?” The reliability score for the commitment scale was 0.713.

Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis technique used in this study was Two-Way ANOVA (Analysis of Variance), conducted using the JAMOVI software. This analysis technique was employed to examine the differences between two independent (categorical) factors and a dependent variable (numeric). In this study, the analysis was conducted to test the effects of the duration of dating on anxiety and commitment while considering demographic factors such as gender, employment status, and long-distance relationship (LDR) status. Each demographic factor interacted with the dating duration and was subsequently compared with the corresponding dependent variables, namely anxiety and commitment.

Result

Based on Table 1, it is evident that there is no significant difference between the dating duration and relationship anxiety ($p=0.173$). Additionally, there is no significant interaction between the dating duration and gender ($p=0.606$), dating duration and LDR status ($p=0.865$), and dating duration and employment status ($p=0.166$) in relation with relationship anxiety. This implies that the dating duration and demographic variables such as gender, employment status, and LDR are not able to predict relationship anxiety in early adulthood.

Based on Table 2, it is evident that there is no significant difference between the dating duration and commitment ($p=0.439$). Additionally, there is no significant interaction between the dating duration and gender ($p=0.606$), dating duration and LDR status ($p=0.053$), and dating duration and employment status ($p=0.654$) in connection with commitment. This suggests that dating duration and demographic variables such as gender, employment status, and LDR are not able to predict commitment in early adulthood.

Discussions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of the duration of dating on commitment and anxiety in early adulthood. Based on the research findings, there is no clear relationship between the level of commitment and anxiety and the duration of dating. The duration of dating was also compared with various demographic factors, including gender, employment status, and long-distance relationship (LDR), to examine how these factors influence anxiety and commitment. The research findings indicate that there is no conclusive relationship between commitment and anxiety in early adulthood with the duration of dating that is associated with demographic factors. Therefore, it can be concluded that levels of commitment and anxiety of individuals in significant romantic relationships, such as marriage, do not differ based on how long they have been dating.

Based on the data, the duration of dating showed no significant impact on anxiety and commitment in early adulthood. These findings contradict previous studies that suggest the duration of dating influences anxiety and

commitment (Collins & Read, 1990; Previti & Amato, 2005). Couples who have spent a significant amount of time together in a dating relationship are considered to have a strong desire to pursue a more serious relationship (Adhim, 2004). For couples who have a strong desire to get married, the dating phase is seen as a time to prepare. Thus, the longer the relationship, the higher the commitment and the lower the anxiety they have toward each other (Gambit, 2000). However, in this study, it is reported that individuals who have been in a long-term dating relationship do not always have low anxiety or high commitment. This could be influenced by the quality of the relationship during the dating period (Durko & Petrick, 2016). In other words, even if they have been dating for a long time, if the relationship lacks positive quality or is filled with problems, high anxiety, and low commitment can still exist in a long-term dating relationship (Wang et al., 2017). These findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that the positive quality of a relationship is associated with levels of anxiety and commitment within the relationship (Givertz, 2019).

Furthermore, according to the data, there is no significant impact of the duration of dating and gender on anxiety and commitment among the participants in this study. These results indicate that both men and women, regardless of their duration of dating, do not necessarily experience significant differences in levels of anxiety and commitment in relationships. This finding highlights a difference from previous studies suggesting that gender influences the level of commitment and anxiety in romantic relationships (Legkauskas & Pazniokaitė, 2018). For example, in previous studies, women often perceive relationships from an emotional standpoint, and as the relationship develops, their emotional attachment strengthens, increasing their commitment to their partners (Hill, 2002). On the other hand, men tend to view long-term dating as an investment for a more serious relationship (Zinck et al., 2022). However, this study indicates that it is not always the case. One factor that may explain the lack of significant influence between the duration of dating, gender, anxiety, and commitment is cultural factors. In Indonesia, there is strong social pressure for women to get married, particularly within a certain timeframe (Pratiwi & Syafiq, 2022). Therefore, women may have a greater desire to seek certainty from their partners in moving towards a more serious relationship, without being significantly influenced by the duration of dating (Ackerman et al., 2011). In this regard, cultural factors can be a strong explanation as to why the duration of dating does not significantly affect the level of anxiety and commitment in early adulthood relationships in Indonesia.

The next set of data also showed no significant role of the duration of dating and employment status toward anxiety and commitment. These results indicate that there are no significant differences in levels of anxiety and commitment of individuals who have been dating for a long time or a short time as well as those who are employed or unemployed in their relationships. This finding may contradict some previous theories that link the duration of dating and employment status to anxiety and commitment in relationships. For example, the role conflict theory suggests that an imbalance between the roles of work and partner can increase anxiety and reduce commitment in relationships (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Table 1. Two-Way ANOVA of Duration of Dating and Interaction with Demographic Factors on Anxiety.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	η^2
Duration of Dating	720.0	1	720.0	1.870	0.173	0.011
Duration of Dating * Gender	103.6	1	103.6	0.267	0.606	0.002
Duration of Dating * LDR	11.20	1	11.2	0.029	0.865	0.000
Duration of Dating * Employment Status	741.8	1	741.8	1.934	0.166	0.011

Table 2. Two-Way ANOVA of Duration of Dating and Interaction with Demographic Factors on Commitment.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	η^2
Duration of Dating	19.50	1	19.50	0.602	0.439	0.004
Duration of Dating * Gender	8.57	1	8.57	0.267	0.606	0.002
Duration of Dating * LDR	121.14	1	121.14	3.792	0.053	0.022
Duration of Dating * Employment Status	6.59	1	6.59	0.201	0.654	0.001

This theory suggests that individuals who are employed and have been dating for a long time would experience higher levels of anxiety and lower levels of commitment in their relationships. However, this study indicates that these factors do not significantly influence anxiety and commitment in early adulthood relationships. These findings are also inconsistent with previous studies that show the impact of employment on relationship commitment and anxiety in individuals (Dew, 2008; Sun et al., 2017). Individual factors such as self-confidence and emotional maturity are likely to contribute to predicting anxiety and commitment in early adulthood relationships (Erol & Orth, 2013; Mosavi & Irvani, 2012). In other words, unemployed individuals can also have high levels of commitment and low levels of anxiety if they have self-confidence and emotional maturity in viewing a long-term relationship with their partner.

The findings about the duration of dating and long-distance relationships (LDR) also revealed that they do not play a significant role in predicting anxiety and commitment. Couples in LDRs do not necessarily exhibit different levels of anxiety and commitment in their relationships. This differs from previous studies explaining how being in an LDR can influence the anxiety and commitment of couples, where non-LDR couples are assumed to have positive closeness and emotional characteristics as well as direct support that leads to a stronger commitment to the relationship, which is not present in LDR couples (Lavner et al., 2016; Markman et al., 2010; Rhoades et al., 2009). This can be explained by the fact that individuals in LDRs who experience less anxiety are more likely to have confidence in their partners (Selsatania, 2022). Additionally, due to technological advancements, individuals in LDRs can communicate with each other through phone or video chats, reducing anxiety and enhancing commitment in their relationship (Billedo et al., 2015). On the other hand, in non-LDRs, lower anxiety may be associated with good communication and relationship quality as a result of regular engagement (Feeney & Fitzgerald, 2019). Other factors such as communication and relationship satisfaction are also considered to play important roles in predicting commitment and anxiety in relationships (Brody, 2013; Joel et al., 2011). Couples who are satisfied with their relationship and have positive communication will influence the levels of anxiety and commitment they experience (Brody, 2013). Therefore, LDRs do not directly affect the commitment and anxiety of couples in both long-term and short-term relationships.

Conclusion and Implications

The findings of this study indicate that the duration of dating does not significantly predict anxiety and commitment in relationships. This implies that in early adulthood, the duration of dating does not play a role in determining the levels of anxiety and commitment in romantic relationships, particularly in more serious stages such as marriage. Therefore, individuals need to understand that the length of time spent dating does not automatically influence anxiety and commitment in relationships. Individuals need to consider other aspects of dating, such as relationship quality, satisfaction, communication, and other positive aspects of the relationship. Additionally, personal factors and cultural influences are likely to play a significant role in affecting anxiety and commitment in relationships. These findings have practical implications for premarital counseling and couple therapy, helping individuals better understand the dynamics of romantic relationships they experience.

This study contributes to the understanding that the duration of dating does not have a significant role in predicting anxiety and commitment in early adulthood. However, there are several limitations to this study. Firstly, this study adopted a cross-sectional design, which limits the understanding of relationship dynamics among individuals in both short-term and long-term dating contexts. Secondly, the participants in this study were predominantly from Javanese culture and mostly female. Future studies should involve more diverse participants from different cultures and ensure proportional representation of both genders. Lastly, the research instruments used in this study originated from Western contexts, which may introduce cultural bias when interpreting relationships in the Indonesian context. Future studies can utilize culturally relevant instruments for Indonesia.

Declarations

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