# Exploring Parental Attachment and Optimism among 12th Grade Vocational High School Students

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## Abstract

**Background:** Statistics Indonesia has recorded that vocational high school graduates have had the highest Open Unemployment Rate (OUR) since 2022. This situation poses a challenge for final-year students, making it important to maintain optimism. Parental attachment can serve as a factor in shaping individual optimism. **Objective:** Understanding the relationship between Parental Attachment and optimism in final-year vocational high school students. **Method:** Quantitative research with a correlational design using Pearson Product Moment analysis. Respondents were 290 twelfth-grade students from a school in Surakarta, selected using cluster random sampling. The instruments used were the Life Oriented Test-Revised (r = 0.715) and the Parental Attachment Scale (r = 0.948). **Results:** There is a relationship between parental attachment and optimism in students (r=0.231; $p<0.05$), although the relationship is considered low. The study found differences in parental attachment scores between male and female students ($M_{difference}$=11.341, $p<0.05$). **Conclusion:** The higher the parental attachment, the higher the students' optimism. Future research can enrich the sample size, examine gender disparities, and explore internal factors related to optimism.

**Keywords**: *Optimism*; *parental attachment*; *vocational high school*

## Abstrak

**Latar Belakang:** Badan Pusat Statistik mencatat lulusan SMK berada pada posisi tertinggi Tingkat Pengangguran Terbuka (TPT) sejak 2022. Kondisi ini menjadi tantangan bagi siswa tingkat akhir yang sedang menjalani masa transisi kehidupan, sehingga penting untuk memiliki optimisme. Kelekatan orang tua mampu menjadi faktor pembentuk optimisme individu. **Tujuan:** Mengetahui hubungan antara kelekatan orang tua dengan optimisme pada siswa tingkat akhir SMK. **Metode**: Penelitian kuantitatif dengan desain korelasional menggunakan teknik analisis *Pearson Product Moment*. Subjek adalah 290 siswa kelas 12 ($N_{Laki-laki}$=272; $N_{Perempuan}$=18) salah satu SMK di Surakarta dengan metode *cluster random sampling*. Optimisme diukur dengan Skala *Life Oriented Test-Revised* (r = 0.715) dan kelekatan orang tua diukur dengan Skala Kelekatan Orang Tua (r = 0.948). **Hasil**: Terdapat hubungan signifikan antara kelekatan orang tua dengan optimisme pada siswa (r=0.231; $p<0.05$) namun hubungan tergolong rendah. Hasil penelitian juga menemukan perbedaan nilai kelekatan orang tua siswa laki-laki dan perempuan ($M_{difference}$=11.341, $p<0.05$) **Simpulan**: Hasilnya semakin tinggi kelekatan orang tua, semakin tinggi optimisme siswa. Penelitian selanjutnya dapat memperkaya jumlah sampel, melihat ketimpangan jenis kelamin, serta mengeksplorasi faktor internal yang berhubungan dengan optimisme.

**Kata Kunci**: Optimisme; kelekatan orang tua; siswa SMK

## Introduction

According to the Law on the National Education System (No. 20/2003), Vocational High School is a secondary education unit aimed at preparing students to work in certain fields (Republik Indonesia, 2003). The learning system in Vocational High School is designed to adjust the needs of the world of work so that individual graduates have relevant competencies in meeting these needs (Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Vokasi, 2022). Although vocational education is envisioned as an embodiment of efforts to improve human development, data in the field still show problems that contradict these expectations. Based on data presented by Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia (2025), Vocational High School graduates occupy the highest level in The Open Unemployment Rate (TPT) with a percentage of 9.01%. Vocational High School students themselves are part of the young generation who have the greatest role in national development. This is certainly a challenge for final-year vocational high school students as a young generation who are running a transition period between their final level of education in secondary education and a much wider life in the future.

As final-year students, those in the 12th grade of vocational high school face considerably greater pressure. The demands of final assignments and Praktik Kerja Lapangan (fieldwork practices) require them to dedicate more energy and time compared to their counterparts in the 10th or 11th grade. Concurrently, they were also confronted with crucial decisions regarding their future paths upon completing secondary education. Consequently, students at this level are required to seriously consider their future goals, a responsibility that is more pressing than for those in lower educational stages. To navigate these conditions, it is crucial for students to maintain a positive and optimistic outlook on their prospects.

Optimism is a theory proposed by Carver and Scheier (2023) regarding how each individual will have a view of the world that is very different from one another. An optimist will view the world with generalized expectancy that good things will happen to him and hold the view that his future tends to lead to positive things (Carver & Scheier, 2023). Meanwhile, individuals who believe that they will eventually achieve an outcome persist, even in the face of great adversity (Carver & Scheier, 2017). This is what underlies that optimism can help individuals to continue to have positive expectations and hopes for the future even when faced with difficult situations (Carver & Scheier, 2017).

Optimism plays an important role in individuals navigating the adolescent developmental stage (Burešová et al., 2020). For adolescents, including 12th grade students with an average age of 16 to 18 years, this stage involves rapid changes that often lead to various emotional and behavioral challenges (Burešová et al., 2020). Optimism serves as a predictor of good mental health in adolescents and can function as a protective buffer against the negative effects of distress (Uribe et al., 2022). Furthermore, higher levels of optimism are associated with greater life satisfaction, psychological development, and academic achievement among adolescents (Supervía et al., 2020). Therefore, it is essential for 12th grade vocational students to cultivate a positive and optimistic attitude as they face the many challenges and demands of their lives.

The social environment plays an important role as an external stimulus that shapes individual optimism (Y. Hadi & Alfiasari, 2023). The role of parents as primary caregivers is the most important element in achieving healthy socioemotional development in children (Uddin et al., 2024). This parental role can contribute greatly to the development of and differences in optimism among individuals (Heinonen et al., 2004). Bowlby (1969) describes attachment as a view of the relationship created between an individual and a caregiver figure which is the basis for the formation of a 'lens' or working model that individuals use in viewing and interacting with themselves, others, and even the world at large. Secure attachment forms a working model in which the world is reliable; therefore, children tend to explore and understand their environments more (Renaud et al., 2019). Thus, children's perceptions of the future and their positive expectations or optimism in achieving certain goals can be formed (Sewell et al. in Faria, 2020).

Previous studies have demonstrated a significant relationship between parental attachment and optimism (Faria, 2020; Hadi & Alfiasari, 2023; Heinonen et al., 2004; Kealy et al., 2022; Korkeila et al., 2004; Renaud et al., 2019). Most of this research has been conducted in Western contexts, with limited exploration in Indonesia. In particular, there is a notable lack of research on Indonesian adolescents, especially those in vocational education. To date, no study has specifically examined the relationship between parental attachment and optimism among 12th grade vocational high school students in Indonesia.

Accordingly, this study seeks to examine the correlation between parental attachment and optimism among 12th grade vocational students, addressing a notable gap in the Indonesian adolescent development literature. Based on the background of relevant literature and previous studies, it is hypothesized that there is an association between parental attachment and optimism among 12th grade vocational high school students at SMKN 5 Surakarta.

## Method

This study used correlational quantitative designs to examine the relationship between the predictor variable of parental attachment and the criterion variable of optimism. To be analyzed with parametric statistical methods through Pearson Product Moment correlation, the data will go through an assumption test first to ensure that it is normally distributed and linear. The sampling technique is carried out using probability, meaning that each member of the population has the same opportunity to become a sample (Sugiyono, 2018). The sampling technique is cluster random sampling, which randomizes the sample groups. The number of samples was measured using the Isaac & Michael formula with a 5% error rate because the population size of the study is already known (Sugiyono, 2018).

Researchers used the Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R) scale from Scheier et al. (1994), which was adapted by Suryadi et al. (2021), to measure student optimism, and the Parental Attachment Scale from Idriyani (2020), which is the result of modification and Indonesian adaptation of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) by Armsden & Greenberg (1987). Both scales must be proven valid and reliable by meeting the requirements of the corrected item-correlation value and Cronbach's alpha before they are declared fit for use. This study meets the ethical requirements of the research by providing the purpose and objectives of the study, as well as its confidentiality, in an informed consent sheet that must be approved by participants.

## Sample or Population

The study population consisted of all 12th grade students at one vocational school in Surakarta. With a population of 770, the minimum sample measured by Isaac and Michael was 240. The sample was obtained through cluster random sampling, where 20 total 12th grade classes at SMA Negeri 5 Surakarta were randomized, and 10 classes were selected to participate, giving all classes an equal chance of being included. The sample consisted of 290 students who filled out the form distributed online. The research data formed in the Google Form link were collected between October 17 and 28, 2024. The data collected consisted of 10 classes of XII grade students, with 272 (93.8%) male students and 18 (6.2%) female students. This imbalance, which occurred because the sampled vocational school focuses on technology and industry and therefore has a majority of male students, may limit the generalizability of the findings, as the experiences and perspectives of female students might not be adequately represented.

## Data Measurement

The Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R) scale, which was adapted into Indonesian by Suryadi et al. (2021), was used as a measurement tool for optimism in this study. This scale consisted of 10 items with 4 filler items (items 2, 5, 6, 8) that were not included in the measurement, and 6 items including 3 positive and 3 negative statements. Examples of these scale items are "In uncertain situations, I usually hope for the best" and "I rarely pin my hopes on good things happening to me." This scale was modeled on a Likert Scale with 5-point options ranging from 0 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). However, to avoid biased answers from respondents, this study used only 4-point options, with ranges of 1 (Strongly Disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Agree), and 4 (Strongly Agree). Items with negative statements were calculated in the reverse order. The results of the scale score calculation were obtained by summing all items, with higher scores indicating a high level of optimism.

The Parental Attachment Scale developed by Idriyani (2020) was used to measure parental attachment. This scale consists of 25 items, with 21 favorable and four unfavorable items. Examples of items on this scale were "My parents accept me as I am" and "My parents trust my opinion." This scale consisted of three dimensions, namely Trust, Communication, and Ailenation, with a 5-point Likert scale model that ranged from 1 (Very Untrue), 2 (Not True), 3 (Sometimes True), 4 (True), and 5 (Very True). Unfavorable items and items on the Ailenation dimension were calculated in the reverse order. The results of the scale score calculation were obtained by summing all the items, with higher scores indicating a higher security level of parental attachment.

Both research instruments underwent a validity and reliability test process to ensure that the scale was suitable for use. Based on the t table (Sugiyono, 2019b), the t value for N = 33 at the 5% significance level was 0.344, and the Cronbach's alpha value that was satisfactory for the scale to be declared reliable was >0.70 (Periantalo, 2023). The corrected item-correlation results for the LOT-R scale showed an r value with a range of 0.532-0.792 (>0.344) so that all items were declared valid for use. The Cronbach's alpha value for the LOT-R scale was 0.715, indicating that this scale was reliable. The corrected item-correlation results for the Parental Attachment Scale resulted in two items (items 11 and 14) having an r value <0.344 (r = 0.228; 0.020) so that the two items had to be eliminated. Furthermore, the Cronbach's alpha value for these 23 items was 0.948. Thus, both scales were suitable for use in this study.

**Data Analysis**

All sample data collected were statistically tested using the Pearson product-moment correlation technique. The Pearson Product Moment correlation technique produced a correlation coefficient (r) that moved from 0.000 to 1.000 in a positive or negative direction depending on the relationship between the two variables (Hadi, 2020). Before the hypothesis is tested, the analyzed data must meet the assumptions of normality and linearity (Sugiyono, 2019a; Widana & Muliani, 2020). Normality was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, where a significance value (p>0.05) indicates that the data were normally distributed (Sholihah et al., 2023). Linearity was assessed through the Deviation from Linearity value in ANOVA for linear regression; a significant value (p>0.05) indicates that the relationship between variables is linear (Wulansari, 2018). An Independent Sample T-Test was also conducted to determine whether there were differences in optimism or parental attachment based on students' gender. The entire data analysis process was performed using SPSS Statistics version 27 software.

**Result**

The data totaled 290 students, with 272 male students (93.8%) and 18 female students (6.2%). This gender imbalance occurs because the vocational high school used as the sample focuses on technology and industry, which tends to attract a higher proportion of male students. The students' ages ranged from 16 to 19 years, with an average age of 17.31 years. Before proceeding with hypothesis testing using parametric analysis, the data were examined to ensure that the assumptions of normality and linearity were satisfied.

Table 1. Normality Test Result

|  | Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test |
|---|---|
| N | 290 |
| p-value | 0.200 |

The Kolmogorov–Smirnov normality test in Table 1 showed a significance value of p=0.200 (>0.05), indicating that the data were normally distributed (Sholihah et al., 2023). The results of the linearity test on the relationship between the two variables are as follows.

Table 2. Linearity Test Result

| Variables | p-value |
|---|---|
| Optimism*Parental Attachment | 0.082 |

The linearity test in Table 2 shows a value of p= 0.082 (>0.05), so it can be concluded that there is a linear relationship between the two variables of parental attachment and optimism (Widana & Muliani, 2020). The results of the normality and linearity assumption tests are met so that hypothesis testing can be performed with parametric analysis using the Pearson Product Moment correlation technique.

The following are the results of the Pearson Product Moment correlation between the two variables conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27.

Table 3. Hypothesis Test Result

| Pearson Product Moment | 0.231 |
|---|---|
| Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.000 |
| N | 290 |

The correlation test results in Table 3 show that the correlation coefficient between parental attachment and optimism is 0.231 with a significance value of 0.001 (p<0.05). This value means that there is a significant positive relationship between the two variables, indicating that students with higher parental attachment tend to have higher levels of optimism, although the strength of the relationship is weak. However, the relationship falls within the range of 0.200 - 0.399 (r = 0.231), indicating a weak correlation (Sugiyono, 2019b). Researchers also looked at the mean differences between the two genders of female and male students on each variable of parental attachment and optimism with the Independent Sample T-Test.

Table 4. Gender Means Difference Test Result

| Variable | t | p-value | Mean Difference |
|---|---|---|---|
| Optimism | -1.881 | 0.061 | -1.018 |
| Parental Attachment | 3.190 | 0.002 | 11.341 |

Based on Table 4, the results show that there is a significant difference (p=0.002, p<0.05) between male and female students on parental attachment variables with $M_{Male}$ = 85.45 and $M_{Female}$ = 74.11. Meanwhile, there was no significant difference between the two sexes on the optimism variable with $M_{Male}$ = 17.98 and $M_{Female}$ = 19.00.

## Discussion

This research on 290 12th grade students at Vocational High School supports the research hypothesis, indicating a significant relationship between parental attachment and optimism. The direction of the relationship in both variables is positive, indicating that any increase in the parental attachment variable will be in line with the increase in the optimism variable, and vice versa.

This study produces findings that align with those of Hadi and Alfiasari (2023), who found a significant positive relationship between parental attachment and optimism among high school students in Bekasi City. Most students with good or secure parental attachment also exhibit high levels of life optimism (Hadi & Alfiasari, 2023). This finding also supports the results of previous studies that highlighted the relationship and role of parental attachment in individual optimism (Faria, 2020; Heinonen et al., 2004; Renaud et al., 2019).

The attachment created between parents and children plays an important role in the formation of children's cognitive, social, and emotional abilities (Ranson & Urichuk, 2008). Warm, interactive, supportive, and respectful relationships between parents and children create a positive family psychosocial environment and contribute to the positive development of children's characteristics (Liu & Wang, 2021). When children feel the support and presence provided by their parents, they develop a feeling of security (Delgado et al., 2022). This feeling of security becomes the foundation for children to explore their world, face certain pressures, and foster courage and confidence (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). In this case, the role of parents who do not restrict and continue to provide space for exploration for children, while still accompanied by love and warmth, contributes to supporting (scaffolding) the next stage of children's life development, including the formation of expectations in children (Izzaty & Ayriza, 2021). This explains the relationship between parental attachment and optimism among children. With a strong foundation, children can form positive perceptions and expectations of their future. Thus, it can be said that the stronger the attachment created between children and their parents, the stronger the optimism that exists in children towards their future.

In adolescents, a high level of parental attachment is found to affect the growth of optimism for the future, which can reduce the tendency of individual involvement in juvenile delinquent behavior (Faria, 2020). Parental attachment formed during childhood is also related to individual self-optimism in adolescence through the mediation of internal locus of control (Renaud et al., 2019). The security created by parental attachment shapes an individual's ability to recall positive memories in the past, so that it affects the individual's positive view of the future (Heinonen et al., 2004). Based on various findings from other studies, it can be concluded that the results of this study can strengthen the findings regarding the correlation of parental attachment with the formation of optimism in individuals.

Although significant, the relationship created between parental attachment and optimism in this study was not strong. This finding is in line with Hadi and Alfiasari's (2023) research, which found that, although significantly related, the relationship between parental attachment and optimism in this study was weak. According to Thomson et al. (2015), this condition can occur because the interaction between individuals and the environment is very complex; therefore, the positive support provided by parents will be subjective and can have different effects depending on the individual's interpretation of the support. In addition, the weak relationship between these two variables illustrates the potential for other factors to influence optimism. These include genetic factors (Carver & Scheier, 2023), internal factors of the individual, including self-concept, individual mental health conditions, and resilience (Thomson et al., 2015), and other external factors, such as school attachment (Taylor et al., 2020).

Furthermore, this study found a significant difference in parental attachment scores between the genders. The mean value of parental attachment in male students was found to be higher than that in female students. Similar findings were found by Miljkovitch et al. (2021), where boys showed higher scores on parental attachment than girls in adolescence. According to Miljkovitch et al. (2021), during this

developmental period, girls generally form closer attachments with their peers than boys; therefore, attachment to parents is generally lower than attachment to peers.

This study enriches the research on similar topics, especially in the field of educational psychology. However, this study has some limitations. First, this study focused solely on one variable, parental attachment, as a determinant of individual optimism. The weak relationship between these two variables suggests that optimism was influenced by other factors that warrant further investigation. Second, the significant gender imbalance among participants limited the variability in female students' scores, which should be considered in future research by striving for a more balanced gender distribution. Fourth, the research process was carried out online, which reduced researcher control and may have introduced response bias. Finally, this study did not explore in depth the specific dimensions of the parental attachment scale, such as Trust, Communication, and Alienation. Nonetheless, these findings open up opportunities for the development of more in-depth follow-up studies on the psychosocial factors that shape optimism among vocational adolescents.

## Conclusion

This study found that parental attachment has a significant and positive relationship with optimism in 12th grade vocational students, such that the higher the parental attachment between parents and students, the higher the optimism formed in students. Conversely, the lower the parental attachment, the lower the optimism formed. However, the relationship between parental attachment and optimism was weak. Therefore, it can be concluded that parental attachment is one of the factors that determine the formation of optimism in students, but there are still other factors that also determine optimism and are not examined in this study.

Future researchers are advised to expand the variety of subjects by examining different educational or age levels of subject development. In addition, it is also recommended to pay attention to the inequality in the number of genders in female and male subjects to provide a better variety of research results. Then, future researchers are advised to examine internal factors that have the potential to strengthen or bridge the relationship that occurs between the two variables. Future researchers could also explore the aspects of each parental attachment variable in depth to produce new findings on the aspects of parental attachment that are most related to optimism.

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