

Perfectionism, Attachment Styles and Perceived Social Support in a Single Child

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to understand the relationship between perfectionism, attachment styles and perceived social support in a single child. The sample included 100 individuals, between the age of 18-30, Indian citizens, who fulfill the criteria of being an only or a single child. The sample was selected using Non-Probability sampling techniques like convenient, purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics (mean) and Pearson's correlation analysis. The findings from this study suggest that there is an association between perfectionism, attachment styles and perceived social support. This association or correlation is such that perfectionism is negatively correlated with secure attachment style and positively correlated with all the three insecure attachment styles in an individual. Perceived social support is positively correlated with secure and dismissive attachment style whereas negatively correlated with fearful and preoccupied attachment style. Perfectionism and perceived social support are negatively correlated. Furthermore, the single child sample of the present study is found to have high perceived social support, a dominant fearful attachment style (although secure and preoccupied also have very close and similar values) and to not have high perfectionistic tendencies.

Keywords: Single Child, Perfectionism, Attachment Styles, Perceived Social Support

Introduction

It can be said without a doubt that an only child experiences a very different childhood and upbringing owing to its unique family structure. The main aspect of this uniqueness is the lack of sibling(s). There is a lot of literature, some myths and some scientific research findings, that talk about the influence this lack of a sibling has on the development of a child. Many psychologists have tried to understand and analyse the behaviours of a single child.

These studies date back to the time of Sigmund Freud who states that only children are more likely to develop sexual identity problems due to this lack of sibling rivalry (Boodman, 1995). Apart from the lack of a sibling, another aspect that adds to the uniqueness of the family environment of a single child is receiving complete attention from the parents. In reference to this, Alfred A Messer in 1968 talks about the "only child syndrome" where the main symptom revolves around getting complete attention from the parents. To explain this he uses the phrase, "he rules the roost" talking about how as the only child of the house, he has control and authority in the household and can get all his demands fulfilled (Boodman, 1995).

In the same article by Boodman (1995), it has been stated that a single child also tends to be a high achiever. This comes as a positive consequence of parents' complete attention on the single child as paren-

ts can not only attend to the child fully but also utilise their resources completely on the only child. Another view of an only child is that they usually prefer small groups or one-on-one friendships over large groups (Kappelman, as cited in Boodman, 1995). Kappelman also states that when in groups, only children are more likely to dominate. This can also be associated with their high achievement oriented traits. Another major set of scientific findings also emerges from Alfred Adler's birth order theory, dating back to the 1900s, which talks about different traits and characteristics of a child based on when they are born in the family. He explains this using two terms, i.e, ordinal position and birth order. 'Ordinal position' refers to the order or rank in which the children are born, namely, first, seconds, third and so on whereas 'birth order' is described by Adler as the "position" of the child based on the order of birth. Adler identifies five main positions, i.e, "firstborn", "second", "middle", "youngest" and "only" (Shulman & Mosak, 1977).

An article by the BetterHelp Editorial Team talks about certain characteristics of an only child based on Adler's theory. According to it, an only child is sensitive and more mature than others of the same age with a sibling. These children relate more with the adults than their peers since they mainly are surrounded by adult interaction right from their childhood. Another characteristic is that they are self-centered, do not share easily with others and are used to being the center of attention. This can be explained in terms of the absence of a sibling and getting complete attention from the parents always (Foster, 2024). Another characteristic defined in this article for an only child is that of high confidence. It can also be understood as high self esteem which can again be attributed to receiving full attention and more praise from their parents as compared to their peers with siblings, where obviously the attention, resources and praises are divided (Welsh, 2023). Another reason can also come from the fact that they are surrounded by adults for the majority of the time and hence have had mature discussions around them. This allows them to believe in their own capabilities more than depending on others further making them independent and self-reliant (Welsh, 2023). Their independence can also be attributed to loss of a companion in terms of a sibling while growing up (Welsh, 2023).

The main concept of birth order theory reiterates what was mentioned in the beginning that socio-environmental factors have an influence on the child's development (Foster, 2024). Hence the characteristics of the only child can be attributed to its unique family structure and social environment. Another significant developmental theory talks about how the social environment of a single child is unique in its own way. This explanation comes from the cognitive development theory by Piaget. It talks about the concept of 'sociodramatic play' or the 'make believe play' in the preoperational stage of cognitive development. During this make believe play, children partner up with others and learn to share, interact and cooperate. It results in actions becoming less self-centered which aids in development of mental representations and schemas (Berk, 2013). Again if the child has a sibling during these years, it means they constantly have a partner or playmate with whom they can participate in pretend play. Absence of a sibling also means absence of such opportunities for the child at home. Hence, it is understood that family and social environment have an important role to play in the development of various characteristics in a child and that for an only child, these factors present a unique environment.

However, various recent and contemporary studies also show how there are no differences in the personality traits and interaction patterns between a single child and one with siblings. For example, Chawla and Vats (2022) conducted a study on Indian adolescents and young adults wherein they highlight that individuals with elder sibling(s) and those without any siblings do not have any significant differences in terms of their interpersonal closeness and self confidence. Similar results have also been suggested by

Tavares et al. (2004) which suggest that single children do not differ from children with siblings in terms of their relationship with their parents and peers. Hence, such studies go on to throw light on the significant changes in the earlier understanding of a single child due to the changing and contemporary times.

Perfectionism can be understood as a characteristic of one's personality (Mosley & Laborde, 2016). A formal definition has been provided by Stoeber which explains perfectionism as, "striving for flawlessness and setting exceedingly high standards for performance, accompanied by tendencies for overly critical evaluations" (Stoeber, 2011; as cited in Mosley & Laborde, 2016). Another definition has been provided by Frost and colleagues which again defines perfectionism as a personality trait or characteristic which includes extremely high standards of self, being intensely critical of the self and being highly sensitive to negative evaluations (Frost et al., 1990; as cited in Fabris & Longobardi, 2023). They have added to the body of knowledge on perfectionism from the multidimensional perspective as well, defining six major dimensions of perfectionism. These six dimensions are "Concern over Mistake", "Personal Standards", "Doubts about Actions", "Parental Expectations", "Parental Criticism", and "Organization" (Frost et al., 1990). Based on these six dimensions, they have also developed a multidimensional scale to assess levels of perfectionism in individuals.

Hewitt and Flett (1991) provide another set of dimensions for perfectionism further elaborating upon its multidimensional nature. They define three dimensions namely, "self-oriented perfectionism", "other-oriented perfectionism", and "socially prescribed perfectionism". Self oriented perfectionism revolves around setting goals and expectations for their own self which are unrealistic and rigorous in nature. These are primarily rooted in the need for success and being afraid of failure. Other-directed perfectionism focuses on the need for perfectionistic behaviour for other people around the individual. It again involves setting irrational goals but directed towards others and not towards the self. Socially oriented perfectionism is a standard set for the self but in relation to meeting the expectations of others around them. This type of perfectionism stems from the need to be perfect as per social norms and in others' eyes. It is primarily driven by the fear of disappointing others (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). The description of these different types of perfectionism hints at how development of perfectionistic traits is influenced by socio-environmental factors like family, parent-child interaction, friends, idealistic figures, peers, etc. Hence, the distinct family structure of a single child mainly contributes to the early adult interaction for an only child in the family. This can greatly influence certain dimensions of perfectionism, especially the socially-oriented perfectionism as per Hewitt and Flett's categorisation and Frost's parental expectation and parental criticism. This highlights how family structure is an important and significant influence in development of perfectionistic traits in an individual.

Attachment, as a concept, has its origin in the works of Bowlby and his famous "Attachment theory". The foundational work of Bowlby's attachment theory had been published in three volumes of the book namely, "Attachment and Loss" (Hofstra, 2009). The first volume talks about the importance of establishing early relationships, which is an innate desire for the child. Bowlby explains the concept of "monotropy" wherein he says that the child, apart from other secondary attachments, makes one "primary attachment" to a figure which usually is the mother. Hence his work began with understanding and trying to explain this initial irreplaceable mother-child bond, which he termed as an attachment. Hence, attachment is not just an innate desire but at the same time an emotional need for the child, which influences the child's overall adulthood wellbeing later on (Bowlby, 1969/1982). Ainsworth et al. (1978) further studied the concept of attachment in individuals and concluded that individual differences existed in the way they would attach to their primary figures (Hofstra, 2009). In their pioneering work titled

“Patterns of Attachment”, they described three different styles of attachment namely, “secure (Type B)”, “insecure avoidant (Type A)” and “insecure ambivalent/resistant (Type C)”. They termed this as the “ABC classification system” of attachment patterns in an individual. Later on, with more work being done on the concept of attachment, a fourth type of attachment style came into existence known as “insecure disorganised/disoriented” (Type D) attachment style (Main & Solomon, 1986). Secure attachment is the one where the child feels safe and confident with the attachment figure. There is slight separation anxiety experienced by the child when the attachment figure is not around and the child desires to be with the attachment figure. Avoidant attachment style is a type of insecure attachment in which the child is not very closely bonded to the attachment figure. Here, unlike the secure attachment, the child does not show signs of separation anxiety when the attachment figure is not around and is equally confident with or without the presence of the attachment figure. They seem “distant” from the parent (mother). Ambivalent attachment is another type of insecure attachment where the child shows signs of resistance when separated from the attachment figure (hence the name insecure resistant attachment style). This is the other extreme where the child shows signs of very severe separation anxiety from the attachment figure (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Finally the fourth established attachment style is that of insecure disorganised type wherein there are signs of fear, disorientation and some sort of confusion within the child. There seems to be an absence of any goal-directed or intentional behaviour initiated by the child and may be seen in the form of scattered or broken (interrupted) movement (Main & Solomon, 1986). These descriptions are based on the experiment findings of Ainsworth et al. (1978) and Main and Solomon (1986) in regard to their “strange situation procedure” observations. Another model of attachment styles has been provided by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) which, based on Bowlby and Ainsworth’s attachment theories, focuses primarily on adult attachment styles and relationships. Ainsworth laid the foundation of development of these attachment styles in childhood. Bartholomew, on the other hand, explains how these take form in adult relationships, emphasising on adult attachment styles mostly as seen in romantic partners. As per their theory of adult attachments, there are four categories of styles of attachment namely, “secure”, “preoccupied”, “dismissive” and “fearful”. Their secure attachment style refers to comfortable, healthy and long-lasting relationships. Such individuals are believed to have an optimistic view of themselves as well as others, have faith in their significant others and can easily express their thoughts, feelings, emotions and needs. attachment styles. Preoccupied attachment style is considered to be similar to or having its early roots in Ainsworth’s ambivalent attachment style. In this type of attachment, as the name suggests, they are constantly preoccupied with anxious thoughts regarding their partner in terms of their availability, insecurity, etc. They have an inclination for external validation and intimacy from their partner or significant other. Dismissive attachment style is understood to be similar to or having its roots in Ainsworth’s avoidant attachment style. This style of attachment is characterised by the need for the individual to be self-reliant. Such individuals usually distance themselves from close intimate relationships and avoid the same. Finally there is the fourth style of attachment namely, fearful attachment style. In this style of attachment, the individual is afraid of a close connection but at the same time desires one as well. Hence, fearful attachment style is known to be a combination of anxious (preoccupied/ambivalent) and avoidant (dismissive) styles (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

In an only child, the distinct parent-child bonding and the absence of a sibling can have an influence on early childhood attachments as well as the later adult attachment styles. In an article on the American population by Ballard (2023) talks about how an only child is most likely to have disorganised attachment styles characterised by a need for intimate relationships but at the same time fear of and difficulty in trusti-

ting others.

An understanding of social support is required prior to understanding the meaning of perceived social support. Social support, as a concept, has been defined by many theorists. It is defined as an “exchange of resources” between individuals which is perceived by the receiver or provider as a means to enhance the overall wellbeing (Shumaker & Brownwell, 1984). Another definition of social support comes from Cohen and Syme (1985) who, too, explain it in terms of an exchange of resources but focus more on the consequences it may have. They emphasise on the fact that this exchange of resources can have positive or negative outcomes. Overall, from the various definitions and explanations of social support, it can be understood that social support is an integral part of an individual’s social environment that significantly influences their wellbeing. Social support and perception of a strong quality social support is considered to be extremely helpful for an individual under stress. This also points at how social support is a significant stress coping strategy. Many studies have also proven the same. (Thoits, 1986; Schwarzer & Knoll, 2007). Apart from utilising it as a coping technique, social support is also understood to be a significant factor to maintain health and heal from illnesses (Cohen & Syme, 1985).

Perceived social support is thereby understood in relation to this social support. Haber et al. (2007) explain social support as a broad umbrella term which consists of different aspects within it. They primarily describe two major sub-constructs or concepts namely, “receipt of supportive behaviour” (received social support) and “support perceptions” (perceived social support). Whereas received social support talks about what an individual actually receives from their social network, perceived social support primarily focuses on the individual’s (recipient) perception regarding when and how the resource or support will be provided and how that will make them feel Sarason et al., 1990; as cited in Haber et al., 2007). However, it is to be noted here that perceived social support has a strong component of individual differences. These individual differences stem from the fact that perceived social support talks about an individual’s own perception and judgement of their social support. It goes without saying that every individual, hence, has its own framework of judging and perceiving their social support and surroundings.

Again, the social environment of a single child significantly differs from those peers with siblings and this difference or uniqueness comes from the absence of a sibling, a social environment element from the individual’s life.

Review of Literature

Fuks and Reiter (2021) conducted a study to assess the association between attachment and perfectionism. According to their study and result findings, they found that there is a relationship between the two such that perfectionistic tendencies decrease with a sense of attachment security in an individual. Hence, their research findings suggest a negative association between perfectionistic tendencies in an individual and attachment security, or secure attachment style. Ko et al. (2019) investigated the possible role of perfectionism in attachment and depression amongst the adolescent population. They assert that perfectionism acts as a mediator or has a mediating role in the relationship or association between attachment insecurities and depression in adolescents. The study helped establish an association between perfectionism, insecure attachment and depression.

Çarikçi and Isik (2024) conducted a study to understand the relationship between insecure attachment styles, perceived social support, anxiety and intolerance of uncertainty. Their research findings suggested that insecure attachment (anxious) and perceived social support (family and significant other and friends) were negatively correlated. The insecure avoidant attachment style was also found to be negatively

associated with perceived social support components. A study conducted by Yassin and Atele (2023) on University students of Sweden suggests a significant correlation between attachment styles and perception of social support such that insecure (avoidant) attachment style was found to be correlated with low perceived social support and secure attachment style was found to be correlated with high perceived social support, especially from the family. Another study conducted by Mehrabian et al. (2023), found that dimensions or factors of perceived social support were positively correlated with positive emotional regulation and those variables of perfectionism were positively correlated with negative emotional regulation, suggesting a negative association between perfectionistic tendencies and perceived social support. Fatima et al. (2023) suggest an association between perfectionistic tendencies, perceived social support and self harm tendencies. The relationship is such that there is a positive relationship between perfectionism and self harm wherein perceived social support acts as a barrier between the two, based on results of mediation analysis. This again points to a possible negative association between perfectionism and perceived social support.

Methodology

Rationale

As per the review of literature, we can see that there is some association or relationship between the three mentioned variables. However, in the mentioned studies, only two variables are taken at a time. The present study attempts at studying the three variables together to investigate the association between them. Furthermore, this study aims at specifically assessing the single child population pertaining to their unique family structure and environment. All the variables namely, perfectionism, attachment styles and perceived social support have family influence as a factor, directly or indirectly. Hence, the importance of assessing these on the single child population.

Aim

To understand the relationship between perfectionism, attachment styles and perceived social support in a single child.

Objectives

- To find the relationship between perfectionism and attachment styles in a single child
- To find the relationship between attachment styles and perceived social support in a single child
- To find the relationship between perfectionism and perceived social support in a single child
- To find the levels of perfectionism, perceived social support and dominant attachment style of a single child

Hypotheses

- There will be a significant relationship between perfectionism and attachment styles in a single child
- There will be a significant relationship between attachment styles and perceived social support in a single child
- There will be a significant relationship between perfectionism and perceived social support in a single child

Variables

Perfectionism, attachment styles (secure, fearful, preoccupied and dismissive) and perceived social

support

Sample

The sample consisted of a total of 100 only children, i.e, individuals without any sibling(s) between the age group of 18-30, with the mean age of 21.08 and belonging to India.

Description of tools

The tools used in the present study include the following scales

- **Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale**

Frost et al. (1990) developed this scale to assess levels of perfectionism in individuals. Originally it measured perfectionism on six dimensions whereas the current version assesses it on four dimensions. It is a 35 item scale based on a 5 point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale measure the total perfectionism score of an individual as well as the score on the four different dimensions or subscales namely, 'Concern over mistakes and doubts about actions', 'Excessive concern with parents' expectations and evaluation', 'Excessively high personal standards' and 'Concern with precision, order and organisation'. Scores of the last dimension are not included in the total perfectionism score.

- **Attachment Style Questionnaire**

Hofstra (2009) developed the Attachment Style Questionnaire based on the theoretical model of Bartholomev and the accompanying Relationship Scales Questionnaire (Griffin and Bartholomev, 1994). This subsequent scale (ASQ) consists of 24 items assessing 4 types of attachment styles namely 'secure', 'preoccupied', 'dismissing' and 'fearful'. The items are measured on a 5 point likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

- **Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support**

Zimet et al. (1988) developed the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support to assess the perception of social support in an individual. It is a 12 item scale measured on a 7 point likert scale ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree). This scale measures perception of social support for three categories namely 'family', 'friends' and 'significant other' and also measures the overall total score.

Procedure

The procedure began with selection of the topic, target population, the variables and the corresponding instruments to assess those variables. The data collection began. The questionnaire included the consent form, basic demographic details of the participants, and the items of the three scales. Participants were also informed of the research, its variables and ethics of the research such as confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent, voluntary participation, etc. Criteria for the sample for this study was that the respondent should be a single child, within the age of 18-30 and an Indian citizen. A total of 100 responses were gathered. Post the data collection, analysis of data began.

Statistical Analysis

For the analysis, descriptive statistics were used and Pearson's Correlation analysis was applied. Descriptive statistics provided results for the levels of perfectionism, perceived social support and the dominant attachment styles in a single child. Furthermore, Pearson's correlation analysis provided results

for the association or correlation between perfectionism, attachment styles (secure, fearful, preoccupied and dismissive) and perceived social support in an only child.

Results and Interpretation

Table 1: Demographics Of The Sample

Dimension	Category	Number of Participants
Gender	Male	36
	Female	62
	Non-Binary	2
Urban or Rural Setting	Urban	96
	Rural	4
Education Qualification	Higher Secondary	4
	Under Graduation	78
	Post Graduation	16
	PhD	2
Total (N)		100

Table 1 represents the demographic details of the sample for the current study. Out of the total sample of 100, 62 are females, 36 are males and 2 identify as non-binary. Furthermore, in terms of their residential settings, x belong to urban living setting and y belong to rural setting. As per the educational qualification of the sample, x are either pursuing or have completed their graduation and y are either pursuing or completed their post graduation. This provides a detailed picture of the demographics and the background of the sample for the current study, hinting towards the socio-economic status of the sample at large.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of The Sample

	Total perfectionism	Perceived Social Support	Secure Attachment Style	Fearful Attachment Style	Preoccupied Attachment Style	Dismissive Attachment Style
N	100	100	100	100	100	100
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0

Mean	88.8	5.25	3.41	3.37	3.27	3.54
Standard deviation	20.8	1.24	0.681	0.936	0.850	0.693

The above table represents the descriptive statistics of the sample, mentioning the total sample size (N=100), mean and standard deviation for the various variables of this study separately. The descriptive statistical analysis shows that the mean score of total perfectionism for the entire sample of only children is calculated to be 88.8. Further, the mean value of perceived social support for the entire sample of only children is calculated to be 5.25 which can be understood as high overall perception of social support for a single child.

Table 3: Dominant Attachment Styles of The Sample

Attachment style	Number of responses (N)
Secure	31
Fearful	32
Preoccupied	31
Dismissive	19

Table 3 represents the dominant attachment styles for the sample of only children in this study. As it can be seen, 31 respondents have a dominant secure attachment style, 32 have a fearful attachment style, again 31 have a preoccupied attachment style and only 19 have a dominant dismissive attachment style. From these results, it can be interpreted that for an only child, the dominant attachment style is usually that of fearful attachment. However, the difference between secure, fearful and preoccupied attachment is statistically very minute so no clear conclusions can be made. Another point to be noted here is that for a total of 10 responses, there were more than 1 dominant attachment styles resulting in multiple dominant attachment styles for one individual. This is another reason why it can't be clearly stated that the dominant attachment style for an only child is fearful.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis

		Total perfectionism	Secure Attachment Style	Fearful Attachment Style	Preoccupied Attachment Style	Dismissive Attachment Style	Perceived Social Support
Total perfectionism	Pearson's r	—					

		Total perfectionism	Secure Attachment Style	Fearful Attachment Style	Preoccupied Attachment Style	Dismissive Attachment Style	Perceived Social Support
	p-value	—					
Secure Attachment Style	Pearson's r	-0.046	—				
	p-value	0.649	—				
Fearful Attachment Style	Pearson's r	0.434**	-0.373**	—			
	p-value	< .001	< .001	—			
Preoccupied Attachment Style	Pearson's r	0.545**	0.097	0.451**	—		
	p-value	< .001	0.337	< .001	—		
Dismissive Attachment Style	Pearson's r	0.197*	-0.141	0.272**	-0.027	—	
	p-value	0.050	0.162	0.006	0.793	—	
Perceived Social Support	Pearson's r	-0.303**	0.305**	-0.213*	-0.222*	0.230*	—
	p-value	0.002	0.002	0.034	0.027	0.021	—

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

The above mentioned Table 4 represents the results for the correlation analysis for the different variables assessed in the sample of only children for the purpose of this study. As mentioned in the table, the total perfectionism score is negatively correlated with secure attachment style, although the strength of correlation is very low ($r = -0.046$). On the other hand, total perfectionism is positively correlated with all the three types of insecure attachment styles with varying strengths. Total perfectionism is positively correlated with dismissive attachment style (avoidant attachment) with the lowest strength among various insecure attachment styles ($r = 0.197$). Next comes the correlation between total perfectionism and preoccupied insecure attachment style (anxious attachment) which is positive and of medium or moderate strength ($r = 0.434$). Finally, the table represents the moderate positive correlation between total perfectionism and fearful insecure attachment style which is also moderately positive but the strongest amongst the different insecure attachments ($r = 0.545$). These three Pearson's correlation values are also statistically significant in the given sample, as highlighted in the table itself. The correlation between total perfectionism and both fearful as well as preoccupied insecure attachment styles are highly statistically significant at 99.9% level of significance ($p < 0.001$). The correlation between total perfectionism and dismissive insecure attachment style is also statistically significant but at 95% level of significance ($p < 0.05$). Further, the table represents the correlation between perceived social support and the four attachment styles. Perceived social support is positively correlated with secure attachment style with low to moderate strength ($r = 0.3$). It is also positively correlated with dismissive insecure attachment style ($r = 0.23$) with low strength. Furthermore, it is negatively correlated with both fearful ($r = -0.213$) and preoccupied attachment ($r = -0.22$) styles with low strength in both. Again, as seen in the table, these values are statistically significant as well. The correlation between perceived social support and secure attachment style is highly statistically significant at a level of significance of 99% ($p < 0.01$). The correlation between perceived social support and the other three insecure attachment styles is also statistically significant but at 95% level of significance only ($p < 0.05$). Finally, the table also depicts the correlation between total perfectionism and perceived social support in a single child. It has been calculated that perceived social support and total perfectionism are negatively correlated with low to moderate strength ($r = -0.3$). This value of correlation between total perfectionism and perceived social support is also statistically significant at a level of significance of 99% ($p < 0.01$) representing strong statistical significance.

Discussion

The purpose or aim of this study was to examine the relationship between perfectionism, perceived social support and different attachment styles in a single child, i.e., an individual without any sibling(s). The objectives were to find the relationship between perfectionism and attachment styles in a single child, to find the relationship between attachment styles and perceived social support in a single child, to find the relationship between perfectionism and perceived social support in a single child and to find the levels of perfectionism, attachment styles and perceived social support of a single child.

As seen in table 2, the mean value of total perfectionism score has been found to be 88.8. This scoring followed the pattern and general norms of FMPS scoring which excluded the items addressing "concerns for orderliness, precision and organisation" component of perfectionism from the total perfectionism score. This is usually done to avoid inflating the results on this multidimensional perfectionism scale and comes from the understanding that this subscale majorly mentions preference for organisation which may not necessarily contribute to negative or pathological perfectionism. This makes the total range of scores

for the overall scale to be 29-145. The interpretation of FMPS says that higher the score, more is the tendency of the individual to indulge in perfectionistic thoughts and behaviours. As it has been mentioned that higher scores lead to more perfectionistic tendencies, 88.8 lies more close to the mid-range values and not close to 145, the highest possible score for perfectionism on this scale (with organisation excluded), single children are not highly perfectionists or do not show high perfectionistic tendencies. This comes contrary to various opinions and viewpoints of different psychologists and theorists who said that only children are highly perfectionists. An article by Welsh (2023) mentions how single children set high standards for themselves since they're surrounded by only adults during their young growing years. The findings of this result depict variations from this mentioned opinion since the score of perfectionism scale does not lie close to the highest score possible (maximum value). This finding can prove to be a significant and essential finding in studies around only children, acting as a myth-buster that a single child is overly independent and perfectionist.

Further, table 2 also depicts the mean value of perceived social support for the sample. As per descriptive statistics and analysis, the mean value of perceived social support for only children (sample of this study) is 5.25 which can be interpreted as high perception of social support. Although a common opinion goes by the fact that only children find it difficult to develop intimate bonds outside home due to the lack of a sibling. However, when it comes to social support, it involves a contribution from all friends, peers and family. It is a known fact that this lack of sibling for a single child is compensated by a strong bond with parents owing to receiving complete undivided attention from them. These results of a high general perceived social support can be explained by this same reasoning that an only child usually has a strong bond with his parents (Robert & Blanton, 2001; as cited in Fowler, 2015). This strong bond with their parents also turns into a great friendship in the absence of a sibling (Pickhardt, 2008; as cited in Fowler, 2015). This strong social support system from the home environment can further contribute to the perception of a strong social support even outside family and home. Another reason for this high perceived social support in a single child can be explained by the quantity vs quality of friend circle for a single child. As mentioned earlier, although only children maintain a very small social circle for themselves, they have a very strong quality of friendships and interpersonal relationships (Murano, 2007; as cited in Fowler, 2015). It has also been explained in the sense that good quality friendships are very important to an only child since they act as sibling-like relationships for them (Pickhardt, 2008; as cited in Fowler, 2015). This further shows how perception of social support is a very significant aspect in the life of an only child and goes on to show how it usually is high, considering their idea of close, truthful and dedicated relationships. It can be interpreted that this feeling of a good quality friendship and relationship with a significant other can influence one's own idea and perception of social support around them.

Table 3 depicts the different dominant attachment styles for the single child sample of this study, corresponding to the number of responses for each dominant attachment style. From the results, it can be seen that the maximum number of individuals have a fearful attachment style and hence, for an only child, fearful attachment is the dominant attachment style. However, two things to be noted here are that, the difference between secure, fearful and preoccupied attachment styles is statistically very minute. Further, 10 responses had more than 1 dominant attachment style. Therefore, it cannot be asserted that only children have a dominant fearful attachment style. However, it can still be concluded that only children have a variety of attachment styles, just like any other sample of young adults, suggesting to some extent that absence of a sibling does not influence attachment styles in later adulthood for an only child. Maximum dominant secure attachment for an only child can be attributed to receiving complete undivided attention

from their parents and resulting in strong bonds with them right from childhood. Maximum dominant preoccupied (anxious) attachment can be explained by the fact that they are so used to receiving this complete attention that when it does not happen in their other peer relationships, they may start taking it on themselves and feeling something is wrong with them, resulting in anxious thoughts about their partner and their relationship. Fearful attachment style is characterised by difficulty in trusting others and feeling uncomfortable in close relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; as cited in Hofstra, 2009). This may again stem from the complete attention by the parents which influences their standards in friendships and other interpersonal relationships. Such high standards from their bonds with their parents also results in them setting high standards for their relationships outside home, making it difficult for them to adjust and trust in these relationships when such high standards are not met by others or their significant other. A similar explanation exists wherein it has been explained how an only child usually has a small circle of friends rather than a big social network of acquaintances (Murano, 2007; as cited in Fowler, 2015). This may be stemming from their difficulty to trust others and high standards of interpersonal relationships coming from their strong bond with their parents and hence a fearful attachment style.

Table 4 represents the results of the correlation analysis for the three variables, perfectionism, attachment styles and perceived social support. Attachment styles have been divided into the four types namely, secure, fearful, preoccupied and dismissive.

As it can be seen in table 4, secure attachment style and perfectionism have a negative correlation but the strength of these correlations is very low. It still, however, explains that the more secure the attachment, lower are the perfectionistic tendencies in an individual. Low perfectionism in a secure attachment can also be explained in terms of accepting oneself and allowing one to make mistakes, without worrying that one's mistakes will hamper the relationship with the other individual. Since it is a secure attachment, one does not need to be flawless in order for the other person to like them or keep liking them. However, since it is a correlation, the results can also be interpreted as having lower perfectionistic tendencies is associated with developing more secure attachments and relationships with others. This can be attributed to the fact that lower perfectionistic tendencies allows the individual to focus less on being flawless and to focus more on developing a healthy secure attachment and interpersonal relationship. The scale used to assess perfectionism does so in terms of perfectionism as a source of psychopathology (Frost et al., 1990) and hence, a negative relationship between this explanation of perfectionism and secure attachment style suggests that security in attachment with others reduces chances of psychopathology due to perfectionistic tendencies. These results are also in line with other literature available on perfectionism and attachment styles. For example, perfectionistic tendencies decrease with a sense of security in attachment with others (Fuks & Reiter, 2021).

Furthermore, perfectionism is also found to have a positive correlation with all the three insecure attachment styles namely, fearful, precocpiced and dismissive attachment styles. With preoccupied it is high correlation, moderate with fearful and low with dismissive. This suggests that insecure attachment styles are associated with having higher perfectionistic tendencies and hence more chances of moving towards psychopathology due to perfectionism. Out of the three insecure attachments, the strongest correlation of perfectionism is with preoccupied attachment style with a positive and high strength. Preoccupied attachment style (also known as anxious attachment) is characterised by constant anxious thoughts about the partner, their availability, need for their validation and thoughts of whether or not their partner still likes them. This is associated with higher perfectionism stemming from these characteristics of the preoccupied attachment style resulting in the need to be flawless and not make any mistake in order

to be liked by their partner. As the name suggests, the individual is pre-occupied with thoughts of their partner and their relationship. These results are in line with the social disconnection model, suggesting that insecure attachment is associated with perfectionistic tendencies and also acts as the root cause for the same (Ko, 2019). Not having a secure bonding with the caregiver in their early development stages results in the individual to be perfect in everything they do in order to seek validation and be liked by their significant other in their later adulthood relationships as well.

Perceived social support and attachment styles also have statistically significant correlations. Association of perceived social support with secure attachment style is positive with moderate strength. This shows that more is the secure attachment, more is the perception of social support for a single child. Further, preoccupied insecure attachment and fearful attachment are found to be negatively correlated with low strength. This suggests that more the inclination for insecure attachment styles, less is the perception of social support for a single child. It can also be interpreted the other way round such that presence or perception of a low social support is associated with preoccupied and fearful attachment styles in a single child or more the perception of social support, less is the likelihood of an insecure attachment style. This may stem from the fact that strong social support means good quality relationships and hence, security in one's interpersonal relationship and absence of any anxious or fearful thoughts regarding the relationship with the other individual. This can also be related to the findings of this study that an only child has a general high perception of social support resulting in less chances of developing a preoccupied (anxious) or fearful attachment style later in adulthood. These findings are in line with other literature present. For example, a study conducted by Yassin and Atele (2023) suggests that secure attachment is correlated with high perceived social support and insecure attachment is correlated with low perceived social support, similar to what has been found in this study. Further, a study also suggests that insecure attachment style has been correlated with high cardiovascular activity and perceived social support, suggesting a negative correlation between social support and insecure attachment styles (McMohan, 2019). Although the strength of these correlations falls in the low to moderate range, it still suggests an association in the negative direction. However, the findings also suggest that perceived social support is positively correlated with dismissive attachment style in an only child, although the strength of correlation is very low. This means that more the perception of social support for a single child, more is the possibility of developing a dismissive or avoidant attachment style. These findings contradict the general literature present which suggests that perceived social support and insecure attachment styles are negatively correlated. This may be attributed to the unique and different interaction patterns of an only child. An important point to be noted here, as mentioned by Dr. Lee in an article by LA Concierge Psychologist, is that attachment styles do not directly determine how many and/or what kind of friends one makes. These are simply their general patterns of behaviours that may have an influence and with the right knowledge of one's own attachment styles and how to deal with it, they can change these general behavioural patterns (Lee, 2020). This may be the case of the single child sample in this data. Furthermore, an only child, considered to be highly independent and self-reliant may end up developing a dismissive attachment. However, the parent-child strong bonding of the only child may contribute to a higher sense of social support. These findings may also be attributed to the current changing times wherein only children, irrespective of their insecure attachment styles, are able to develop strong social support system and friendships around them owing to various residential societies, community parks, peer group interaction during early developmental years, etc. It is to be noted that the overall perceived social support for only children has been calculated to be high for the sample of this study, which also explains these results in a way.

Perfectionism and perceived social support are found to be negatively correlated with moderate strength suggesting that higher perception of social support for a single child is associated with less perfectionistic tendencies for the individual. This can also stem from the fact that higher social support results in good quality secure interpersonal relationships which reduces the need to be perfect and flawless. One does not wish or feel the need to be perfect in order to be liked by the other person hence also allowing them to maintain healthy relationships and build on a strong social support network for themselves. Since it is correlation, it can also be concluded that exhibiting less perfectionistic tendencies results in having a strong sense of social support. This again can be attributed to the fact that the individual's thoughts and feelings are more concerned with the interpersonal relationship and social support network rather than focusing on not making mistakes or being perfect. The findings from this research are in line with other literature present. For example, a study conducted by Mehrabian et al. (2023) suggests a negative correlation between perceived social support and perfectionism based on their results that factors of perceived social support had a strong positive association with strategies of positive emotional regulation whereas factors of perfectionism had strong positive associations with techniques of negative emotional regulation. However, they contradict a study done by Kabir and Shehnaaz in 2021 on correlation analysis between perceived social support and perfectionism. Their analysis resulted in a positive correlation suggesting that more the perception of social support, more is the perfectionistic tendencies. This can be attributed to the fact that the current study is done on the single child population only and their interaction patterns might be slightly different than the general population of individuals who have sibling(s). This can also be attributed to certain changes in the current times. The findings from the current study with regards to the correlation between perfectionism and perceived social support can also be backed by the descriptive analysis of the current sample as the general overall perception of social support for a single child is high in this sample and the total perfectionism score is also low to moderate, it is not close to the highest value.

Conclusion

To conclude our findings and discussions, it can be said that there is a statistically significant relationship between perfectionism, attachment styles and perceived social support in an only/single child. These findings are such that perfectionism is positively correlated with secure attachment styles and negatively correlated with all the three insecure attachment styles. Further, perceived social support is positively correlated with secure and dismissive attachment styles and negatively correlated with fearful and preoccupied attachment styles. Finally, perfectionism is negatively correlated with perceived social support. The findings also help us conclude that an only child does not have a high score in perfectionism suggesting that they don't have high perfectionistic tendencies, contrary to the general opinion. Furthermore, the mean perceived social support of the sample is found to be falling in the range of high social support suggesting that only children have a high perception of social support. In terms of attachment styles, the maximum dominant style for the current sample is found to be fearful attachment style, however, the values of fearful, secure and preoccupied and very close and hence no direct conclusions can be made. The attachment style found to be the least common in the sample is dismissive attachment style. Further, it can be said that there are no completely different interaction patterns in an only child since the correlations are found to be more or less similar to the literature already present which is not specifically about the only child population. The only differences have been found in the relationship between perceived social support and dismissive attachment styles and between perfectionistic tendencies and perceived social support, for which there is literature present suggesting both positive and

negative relationships. These variations might be characteristic to the only child population. A few limitations can be considered for the present study. First and foremost is the social desirability component. It is possible that the participants were not completely honest while responding to the questionnaire items and may have been influenced by social desirability, affecting the results. Further, a larger sample size than the current sample size could lead to more conclusive findings. Approaching these objectives and hypotheses from a longitudinal and/or a qualitative perspective may yield findings in terms of themes and reasonings. For further studies, a regression or mediation analysis can also be conducted for more findings around these variables and this target population. Further studies may also be conducted from a comparison point of view wherein the individuals who are a single child and those who have a sibling can be compared on these parameters.

The findings of the present study contribute to the body of knowledge of perfectionism, attachment styles, perceived social support and literature around a single child. Another significant implication or contribution of this study is that it provides notable knowledge of these parameters and this target population in an Indian setting. There is still a lot of contemporary research needed for the single child population and that too in the Indian setting, and this study makes a significant contribution to that. Understanding the attributes of a single child allows Indian Parents to plan their family accordingly, keeping the myths aside and based on scientifically proven aspects. It not only aids the parents in terms of child rearing and parenting tips for a single child but at the same time makes the single child more self aware.

Appendix

Appendix A

Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale

Instructions: Please answer the following questions in relation to how much they apply to you. Do not spend too much time on anyone.

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	My parents set very high standards for me.					
2.	Organization is very important to me.					
3.	As a child, I was punished for doing things less than perfectly.					
4.	If I do not set the highest standards for myself, I am likely to end up a second-rate person.					
5.	My parents never tried to understand my mistakes.					
6.	It is important to me that I be thoroughly					

	competent in what I do.					
7.	I am a neat person.					
8.	I try to be an organized person.					
9.	If I fail at work/school, I am a failure as a person					
10.	I should be upset if I make a mistake.					
11.	My parents wanted me to be the best at everything.					
12.	I set higher goals than most people.					
13.	If someone does a task at work/school better than I do, then I feel as if I failed the whole task.					
14.	If I fail partly, it is as bad as being a complete failure.					
15.	Only outstanding performance is good enough in my family.					
16.	I am very good at focusing my efforts on attaining a goal.					
17.	Even when I do something very carefully, I often feel that it is not quite right.					
18.	I hate being less than the best at things.					
19.	I have extremely high goals.					
20.	My parents expect excellence from me.					
21.	People will probably think of me if I make a mistake.					
22.	I never feel that I can meet my parents' expectations.					
23.	If I do not do as well as other people, it means i am an inferior being.					

24.	Other people seem to accept lower standards from themselves than I do.					
25.	If I do not do well all the time, people will not respect me.					
26.	My parents have always had higher expectations for my future than I have.					
27.	I try to be a neat person.					
28.	I usually have doubts about the simple everyday things that I do.					
29.	Neatness is very important to me.					
30.	I expect higher performance in my daily tasks than most people.					
31.	I am an organized person.					
32.	I tend to get behind in my work because I repeat things over and over.					
33.	It takes me a long time to do something "right".					
34.	The fewer mistakes I make, the more people will like me.					
35.	I never feel that I can meet my parents' standards					

Appendix B

Attachment Style Questionnaire

Instructions: Read each statement carefully. Indicate how you feel about each statement based on the below mentioned options; ‘strongly disagree’, ‘disagree’, ‘neutral’, ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’.

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	I feel at ease in emotional relationships					
2.	I avoid close ties.					
3.	I trust other people and I like it when					

	other people can rely on me.					
4.	I find it easy to get engaged in close relationships with other people.					
5.	I feel at ease in intimate relationships.					
6.	I think it is important that people can rely on each other.					
7.	I trust that others will be there for me when I need them.					
8.	I would like to be open to others, but I feel I can't trust other people.					
9.	I would like to have close relationships with other people, but I find it difficult to fully trust them.					
10.	I'm afraid that my hopes will be deceived when I get too closely related to others.					
11.	I am wary to get engaged in close relationships because I'm afraid to get hurt.					
12.	I feel uncomfortable when relationships with other people become close.					
13.	I often wonder whether people like me.					
14.	I have the impression that usually I like others better than they like me.					
15.	I am often afraid that people don't like me.					
16.	I fear to be left alone.					
17.	I don't worry whether people like me or not.					
18.	I find it important to know whether other people like me.					
19.	I usually find other people more					

	interesting than myself.					
20.	I feel comfortable without having close relationships with other people.					
21.	It is important to me to be independent.					
22.	I prefer that others are independent of me, and that I am independent of others.					
23.	I like to be self-sufficient.					
24.	I don't worry about being alone: I don't need other people that strongly.					

Appendix C

Multidimensional Scale for Perceived Social Support

Instructions: We are interested in how you feel about the following statements. Read each statement carefully. how you feel about each .

Circle the “1” if you very strongly disagree

Circle the “2” if you strongly disagree

Circle the “3” if you mildly disagree

Circle the “4” if you are neutral

Circle the “5” if you mildly agree

Circle the “6” if you strongly agree

Circle the “7” if you very strongly agree

		Very Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mildly Disagree	Neutral	Mildly Agree	Strongly Agree	Very Strongly Agree
1.	There is a special person who is around when I am in need.							
2.	There is a special person with whom I can share joys and sorrows.							
3.	My family really tries to help me.							
4.	I get the emotional help &							

	support I need from my family.							
5.	I have a special person who is a real source of comfort to me.							
6.	My friends really try to help me.							
7.	I can count on my friends when things go wrong							
8.	I can talk about my problems with my family.							
9.	I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows.							
10.	There is a special person in my life who cares about my feelings							
11.	My family is willing to help me make decisions.							
12.	I can talk about my problems with my friends.							

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