

A Study to Assess the Attachment Styles, Self Esteem and Loneliness Among Undergraduates of Selected Colleges, Ludhiana, Punjab.

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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between attachment styles, self esteem and loneliness among undergraduate students. Attachment theory suggests that early relationships influence emotional regulation and interpersonal behaviour, which may affect social experiences in adulthood. Self esteem, a key indicator of an individual's self worth and loneliness. This research investigates how different attachment styles- secure, anxious, and avoidant-relate to levels of self esteem and loneliness among undergraduates. A quantitative research approach & non experimental cross-sectional descriptive research design was used to assess attachment styles, levels of self esteem and loneliness. Data was collected from were undergraduates of Dayanand Medical College and DMCH College of Nursing, Malakpur, Ludhiana, Punjab by using non probability total enumerative sampling technique. Responses were collected by self-report (Pen & Paper) method using Revised Adult Attachment Scale – Close Relationship Version given by Collins (1996), Rosenberg self esteem scale given by Rosenberg (1965), UCLA (University of California Los Angeles) Loneliness Scale given by Russell (1996). Data was tabulated and analyzed by using descriptive & inferential statistics. The present study concluded that the majority of undergraduates showed avoidant attachment style (depend). The avoidant attachment style was having moderate negative correlation with self esteem. Hence, it illustrates that as avoidant attachment style increased, the self esteem decreased. Similarly, self esteem and loneliness were having moderate negative correlation with showing that if self esteem increased loneliness decreased. Majority of undergraduates showed normal level of self esteem and moderate level of loneliness but the mean score was higher in high level of self esteem and loneliness respectively.

Keywords: attachment styles, self esteem, loneliness.

Introduction

In today's world, the main developmental task of young adulthood is to relinquish parental attachments and form new attachment with same or cross sex peers¹. Attachment is an emotional bonding that develops between people. The person's ability to have a close relationship with other people is one of the most important features of a healthy personality. Attachment behaviour is not only a part of infancy but also is a part of childhood, adolescence and adulthood. The early prototypical model of attachment has

three categories: secure, anxious and avoidant. Secure attachment style means an individual displays confidence due to consistent availability of attachment figure or the caregiver act as a safe space for them. Anxious attachment style desires more closeness than others are typically willing to provide. Avoidant attachment style deliberately avoids closeness with others². In adults, attachment styles follow more or less the same pattern, with adults having secure attachment being able to maintain intimate and satisfying relationships with their partners. Secure attachment serves as a foundation for emotional well being, healthy relationship and personal growth. Hence, adults with secure attachments would have better supportive relationships, as the quality of supportive relationship is largely decided by the individual's own relational competence and social skills. Insecure attachment is considered to hinder social exploration, which might hamper the growth of social skills and significantly affect the establishment of harmonious relationship with peers¹. Individuals with anxious attachment often base their self worth on their relationships and how they perceive their partners validation and approval. People with avoidant attachment style generally tend to be rebellious and short-tempered in nature and non-adjusted in society, resulting in loneliness. Since they are avoided and lonely, they may seek sympathy and attention. A study showed that lack of secure attachment can lead to difficulties in regulating emotions and relating to others, gives rise to vulnerability to psychological distress, loneliness and depression⁴.

Need for study

Human beings are social animals driven by the fundamental need to socialize and belong¹. When there is social isolation, it leads to adverse mental health consequences⁵. Individuals earlier used to sit and spend hours by visiting their family members frequently as this helps to rejuvenate them from the daily work life. Nowadays people spend countless hours of their life attached to devices with the intent of communicating with others, sharing information etc. This disconnection creates a gap in parent-child relationship as they don't bother to share their problems and parents are losing touch with what is happening in their child's life. Research shows that an individual develops the ability to self-soothe in infancy and they continue to draw upon this skill throughout their lives, when troubled, they engage in instrumental coping and a deactivating strategy that minimizes the importance of emotions and close relationships⁴. According to John Bowlby, an infant's sense of security is affected by their relationship with their caregivers⁶. The lack of secure attachment can lead to difficulties in regulating emotions and relating to others⁷. The most important tenet is that a person needs to develop a close relationship with at least someone for normal social and emotional development. If they fail to do so it leads to loneliness which can further cause many mental health problems. Bolstering the confidence is also necessary for the person to become more welcoming¹⁰. Hostel conditions give an open door for socialization among undergraduates. People having high self-esteem, tend to have higher levels of confidence and hence they seem to be more outgoing which makes them less lonely as compared to the people who have low self-esteem⁴. Research study namely "Attachment style and Loneliness: The Mediating Role of self-esteem" highlights the importance of understanding attachment styles in relation to both self-esteem and loneliness. It suggests that secure attachment may serve as a protective factor against loneliness, while anxious attachment may contribute to feelings of loneliness and lower self-esteem. Additionally, the study underscores the need for interventions aimed at promoting secure attachment and enhancing self-esteem to alleviate loneliness among young adults⁵. Overall, researching attachment styles, self-esteem and loneliness is essential for advancing our understanding of human behaviour, promoting mental health, improving relationship dynamics, informing clinical practice. If we implement strategies on how

to stay connected, it can help to decrease the sense of perceived loneliness and lower the chances of developing more serious health issues¹⁰. Hence, the researcher felt the need to study attachment style, self esteem and loneliness among undergraduates so as to understand how attachment style can have a significant impact on the self worth, thought, feelings of the individual thereby deciding their level of self esteem and loneliness.

Problem statement

A study to assess the attachment styles, self esteem and loneliness among undergraduates of selected colleges, Ludhiana, Punjab.

Objectives

1. To assess the attachment styles, level of self esteem and loneliness among undergraduates.
2. To find out the relationship between attachment styles, self esteem and loneliness among undergraduates.
3. To determine the association of attachment styles, self esteem and loneliness with the selected socio-demographic variables of undergraduates.
4. To develop a lesson plan and conduct teaching on attachment styles, self esteem and loneliness among undergraduates.

Operational definitions

Attachment style: refers to the characteristic way of emotional bonding an undergraduate student develops and relates with others i.e family members, relatives, close friends and colleagues in terms of secure, avoidant and anxious- avoidant attachment as assessed by Revised Adult Attachment Scale- Close Relationship Version (Collins,1996).

Self esteem: refers to the way an undergraduate student perceives/thinks or evaluates his or her own thoughts, feelings and values about his/her own self worth ,self integrity and self image as measured by Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (1965).

Loneliness: refers to subjective feeling of an undergraduate being alone, having limited people to interact regularly and unable to maintain a close relationship with others even after having a will of doing so as measured by the UCLA(University of California Los Angeles) Loneliness Scale (Rusell,1996).

Undergraduate: refers to a student undergoing MBBS and BSc nursing degree course in a college affiliated to Baba Farid University Of Health Sciences, Faridkot.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research approach utilizing non experimental cross sectional descriptive research design to collect the required and necessary information about attachment styles, self esteem and loneliness among undergraduates and was conducted at Dayanand Medical College and DMCH College of Nursing, Malakpur, Ludhiana, Punjab. The sample comprised of MBBS 1st Year and BSc Nursing 1st year students and were selected by using non probability total enumerative sampling technique. Data collection tools included Socio-demographic profile, Revised Adult Attachment Scale – Close Relationship Version given by Collins (1996), Rosenberg self esteem scale given by Rosenberg (1965), UCLA (University of California Los Angeles) Loneliness Scale given by Rusell (1996). Pilot

study was carried out on 20 undergraduates. 10 students were taken from MBBS 2nd year and 10 students from Bsc (N) 2nd year in the month of February 2024. Formal written permission was obtained from ethical committee of DMCH, Ludhiana, Principal of DMC&H and DMCH College of Nursing, Malakpur, Ludhiana, Punjab to conduct study.

Table1: Frequency and percentage distribution of undergraduates as per their socio- demographic profile
N=193

Socio demographic variables	f (%)
Age (in years)*	
17-18	87(45.2)
19-20	101(52.3)
21-22	05(02.5)
Gender	
Male	51(26.43)
Female	142(73.57)
Religion	
Hindu	86(44.56)
Sikh	102(52.85)
Christian	04 (02.07)
Muslim	01 (0.52)
Birth Order	
1 st	95(49.23)
2 nd	89(46.11)
3 rd and above	09(04.66)
Type of family	
Nuclear	131(67.86)
Joint	60(31.10)
Extended	02(01.04)
Habitat	
Urban	135(69.94)
Rural	58(30.06)
Place of stay	
Hostel	159(82.38)
Home	30(15.54)
Paying Guest	04(02.08)
Type of school during +2	
Government	31(16.06)
Private	162(83.94)
Time spend with parents per day	
Yes	151(78.24)
No	42(21.76)
Duration per day(n=151)	

<30mins	30(19.86)
30mins-1hour	73(48.34)
2hours – 3hours	48(31.78)
Means of spending time with parents	
Phone calls	170(88.08)
Home stay	23(11.92)
Personal history of psychiatric illness	
Yes	03(01.55)
No	190(98.45)
Type of disorder(n=3)	
Dissociative disorder	01(33.33)
Social Anxiety	01(33.33)
Panic disorder	01(33.33)
Family history of psychiatric illness	
Yes	02(01.04)
No	191(98.96)
Type of disorder(n=2)	
Depression	01(50)
Huntington	01(50)
Socio economic class (According to kuppuswamy socio economy scale 2023)	
Upper(I)	72(37.30)
Upper middle(II)	87(45.08)
Lower middle(III)	34(17.62)

*Mean age (in years) =18.69±0.87

The above table implies that maximum undergraduates were in the age group of 19-20 years with the mean age of 18.69±0.87. Majority were females, belonged to sikh religion, being 1st born, living in nuclear family and residing in urban areas. Majority of them stayed in hostel who studied in private school during their +2. Majority of the undergraduates spent time with their parents via phone calls and had no personal or family history of psychiatric illness and most of them belonged to upper middle socioeconomic status.

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of attachment styles among undergraduates.
N=193

Attachment styles	Mean ±SD
SECURE	18.20±3.40
ANXIOUS	15.27±4.09
AVOIDANT	18.43±5.78

Minimum score (each domain) = 6

Overall Mean±SD = 51.90 ±6.58

Maximum score (each domain) = 30

It reveals that mean avoidant attachment style score (18.43 ± 5.78) was slightly higher as compared to mean secure attachment style score (18.20 ± 3.40) followed by mean anxious attachment style score (15.27 ± 4.09) among undergraduates. Hence, it was examined that the avoidant attachment style was found among undergraduates.

Table 3: Frequency , Percentage distribution and Mean, Standard deviation according to the level of self esteem among undergraduates.

N=193

Level of Self esteem	Score	f(%)	Mean $\pm$ SD
Low	<15	35(18.1)	12.37 $\pm$ 2.41
Normal	15-24	148(76.7)	18.61 $\pm$ 2.43
High	25-30	10(5.2)	26.00 $\pm$ 1.33

Minimum score=0

Overall Mean $\pm$ SD = 17.86 $\pm$ 3.84

Maximum score=30

Table 3 indicates that majority 148(76.7%) of the undergraduates with mean score 18.61 ± 2.43 had normal level of self esteem followed by 35(18.1%) low level of self esteem with mean score 12.37 ± 2.41 and only 10(5.2%) high level of self esteem with mean score 26.00 ± 1.33

Though , majority of the undergraduates had normal level of self esteem but the mean score was highest in high level of self esteem. Hence, the findings revealed that majority of undergraduates had normal level of self esteem.

Table 3: Frequency, Percentage distribution and Mean, Standard deviation according to the level of loneliness among undergraduates.

N=193

Level of loneliness	Score	f(%)	Mean $\pm$ SD
Low	20-34	36(18.7)	30.19 $\pm$ 2.51
Moderate	35-49	116(60.1)	41.44 $\pm$ 4.47
Moderately high	50-64	38(19.7)	55.60 $\pm$ 4.61
High	65-80	3(1.5)	68.66 $\pm$ 3.05

Minimum score= 20

Overall Mean $\pm$ SD = 42.55 $\pm$ 9.50

Maximum score= 80

Table 3 reveals that majority 116(60.1%) of undergraduates with mean score 41.44 ± 4.47 had moderate level of loneliness, 38(19.7%) with mean score 55.60 ± 4.61 had moderately high level of loneliness, 36(18.7%) with mean score 30.19 ± 2.51 had low level of loneliness and 3(1.5%) with mean score 68.66 ± 3.05 had high level of loneliness.

Thus, majority of undergraduates had moderate level of loneliness but the mean score of loneliness was on higher side among undergraduates.

Table4: Correlation between attachment styles , self esteem and loneliness among undergraduates.
N=193

Variables	Mean±SD	r (p)
A.Attachment styles		A & B = - 0.165(0.021*)
a' secure	18.20±3.40	a' & B = 0.148(0.040*)
b' anxious	15.27±4.09	b' & B = 0.187(0.009*)
c' avoidant	18.43±5.78	c' & B = -0.415(<0.001**)
B. Self esteem	17.86±3.84	B & C = -0.451(<0.001**)
C. Loneliness	42.55±9.50	A&C = 0.083(<0.001**)
		a'&C = -0.261(<0.001*)
		b'&C = -0.299(<0.001*)
		c'&C = 0.506(<0.001*)

*** -Very highly significant $p < 0.001$ level

* -Significant $p < 0.05$ level

^{NS}-Non- significant

It illustrates that as avoidant attachment style increased, the self esteem decreased. Similarly findings also revealed that, self esteem and loneliness had moderate negative correlation and was statistically very highly significant at $p < 0.001$ level.

Discussion

The findings of study concluded that majority of undergraduates showed avoidant attachment style with normal level of self esteem and moderate level of loneliness. secure attachment style had a statistically significant association with the male gender and christian religion. Anxious attachment style had a statistically significant association with the male gender, means of spending time with parents via home stay. Avoidant attachment style had a statistically significant association with the type of school. Self-esteem and loneliness had a statistically significant association with the personal history of psychiatric illness. For instance , **Nottage M, Oei N, Wolters N, Vonk P (2022)** did an exploratory study on showing that loneliness mediates the association between insecure attachment and mental among university students. Total of 265 students were taken as sample. The findings mentioned that in individuals with mixed attachment styles loneliness mediated the positive association between attachment styles and depressive symptoms⁹.

Conclusion

The present study concluded that the majority of undergraduates showed avoidant attachment style. The avoidant attachment style had moderate negative correlation with self- esteem. Hence, it illustrates that as avoidant attachment style increased, the self-esteem decreased. Similarly, self-esteem and loneliness had moderate negative correlation showing that if self-esteem increased loneliness decreased. Majority of undergraduates showed normal level of self-esteem and moderate level of loneliness but the mean score was higher in high level of self-esteem and loneliness respectively. Secure and anxious attachment style had weak negative correlation with loneliness. Moreover, avoidant attachment style had moderate positive correlation with loneliness. Hence, it can be concluded that if secure or anxious attachment style increased, loneliness decreased. But, if avoidant attachment style increased, loneliness increased as well.

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