

Attachment Styles and Romantic Relationship Satisfaction Among Young Adults

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Abstract

The construct of adult attachment and its influence on relational outcomes have gained significant attention in psychological research, yet it remains an underexplored area within the contemporary Indian urban context. While existing global literature consistently highlights the role of internal working models in shaping romantic bonds, there is a need to understand how these dynamics manifest among Indian young adults navigating shifting socio-cultural paradigms. This study aimed to examine the relationship between adult attachment styles; Secure, Anxious, and Avoidant and romantic relationship satisfaction. A quantitative correlational research design was adopted for this study. Data were collected from a sample of 47 young adults (N=47), primarily aged 18–25, using the Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS) and the Relationship Satisfaction Scale. The findings revealed that secure attachment was a significant positive predictor of relationship satisfaction ($r = .64, p < .01$). Conversely, both avoidant attachment ($r = -.48, p < .01$) and anxious attachment ($r = -.39, p < .01$) were found to be significantly and negatively correlated with satisfaction levels. Beyond the primary correlations, a significant gender difference was observed, with males reporting higher levels of avoidant attachment compared to females ($t = 2.18, p < .05$), suggesting the influence of socialized gender roles. Overall, the study highlights attachment security as a multidimensional predictor of relational fulfillment and emphasizes the importance of attachment-informed counseling for the psychological well-being of young adults in India.

Keywords: Adult attachment, Relationship satisfaction, Indian young adults, Gender differences, Attachment security.

Introduction

Attachment theory, as conceptualized by Bowlby (1969), remains a cornerstone in understanding the longitudinal trajectory of human emotional development and interpersonal functioning. Central to this theory is the "internal working model", a cognitive-affective framework established through early caregiving experiences that guides perceptions of the self and others throughout the lifespan. While Ainsworth (1978) initially categorized these patterns in childhood, subsequent research by Hazan and Shaver (1987) extended these constructs to adult romantic relationships, identifying three primary orientations: secure, anxious-ambivalent, and avoidant attachment.

In the stage of "emerging adulthood" (Arnett, 2000), typically spanning ages 18 to 30, romantic relationships become a focal point for identity formation and emotional stability. Securely attached

individuals generally navigate these bonds with trust and intimacy, whereas those with anxious or avoidant orientations often experience hyper-activating or deactivating strategies, respectively (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). These orientations significantly influence romantic relationship satisfaction, an individual's subjective contentment with their partner and relational dynamics (Hendrick, 1988), which serves as a critical determinant of overall mental health and life satisfaction.

Despite the universality of attachment systems, their behavioral manifestations are deeply influenced by cultural values. In collectivist societies like India, traditional family influences and interpersonal harmony create a unique backdrop for romantic bonds (Kagitcibasi, 2005). Currently, there is a rising concern regarding relational instability, commitment anxiety, and emotional distress among Indian young adults. Counseling centers increasingly report interpersonal conflicts rooted in attachment insecurity, yet much of the existing empirical literature remains Western-centric.

The shift toward modern relationship expectations in urban India, contrasted with traditional values, necessitates a localized exploration of these psychological constructs. There is a notable gap in empirical research regarding how specific attachment styles drive relationship satisfaction within this specific demographic. By investigating these underlying mechanisms, the present study aims to provide culturally relevant insights that can inform therapeutic practices, premarital counseling, and campus mental health interventions, ultimately fostering healthier emotional connections among young adults.

Review of Literature

The theoretical framework of attachment, originally proposed by Bowlby (1969), represents an evolutionary control system designed to maintain proximity to a caregiver for survival. This "secure base" phenomenon was empirically categorized by Mary Ainsworth (1978) through the "Strange Situation" procedure, which identified three primary patterns: secure, anxious-ambivalent, and avoidant (Ainsworth et al., 2015). Longitudinal research by Waters et al. (2000) demonstrated a remarkable 20-year stability of these early representations, proving that infant experiences solidify into "Internal Working Models", mental blueprints of the self and others that guide emotional regulation throughout the lifespan (Pietromonaco & Barrett, 2000; Zimmermann, 2004). Further refinements by Main and Solomon (1990) introduced disorganized patterns, while meta-analyses of 10,000 interviews by Bakermans-Kranenburg and van IJzendoorn (2009) confirmed that these representations are consistent across diverse clinical and non-clinical global populations.

The transition of attachment theory to adult romantic partnerships was pioneered by Hazan and Shaver (1987), who argued that adult love follows the same biological rules as infant-caregiver bonds. This is particularly salient during "emerging adulthood" (Arnett, 2000), a developmental stage characterized by a shift toward relational independence (Overbeek et al., 2007). Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) expanded this into a four-category model based on positive or negative views of the self and others. Psychometric advancements, such as the ECR-RS developed by Fraley et al. (2011) and Kane et al. (2007), allow researchers to measure anxiety and avoidance as continuous dimensions. These styles are not merely psychological constructs; they significantly impact physiological reactivity to stress (Diamond & Hicks, 2005) and dictate personal adaptation to high-pressure environments like universities (Lopez & Brennan, 2000). Interestingly, Tancredy and Fraley (2006) observed that attachment processes even govern the unique emotional bonds found between adult twins, highlighting the pervasive nature of these internal models.

Relationship satisfaction is defined as a subjective evaluation of a partner's ability to meet one's emotional and physical needs (Hendrick, 1988). Research by Simpson (1990) and Pistole (1989) established that secure individuals report higher satisfaction due to superior conflict resolution and effective communication skills (Egeci & Gencoz, 2006). Conversely, insecure attachment, specifically an "insecure self", is strongly linked to depressive symptoms and lower quality bonds (Wei et al., 2007; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). Furthermore, satisfaction is heavily influenced by sexual fulfillment (Butzer & Campbell, 2008) and caregiving behaviors (Roisman et al., 2007). In a massive machine-learning meta-analysis, Joel et al. (2020) identified that relationship-specific factors, such as "perceived partner responsiveness," are the most powerful predictors of quality. This aligns with the "Feeling Known" phenomenon described by Schroeder and Fishbach (2024), where the sense of being understood by a partner acts as a cornerstone of modern relational fulfillment.

Gender plays a significant role in the expression of attachment. Levant (1996) and Del Giudice (2019) argue that masculine socialization often leads to higher avoidance scores in men, a trend supported by Schmitt et al.'s (2003) 62-nation study. However, these variations must be viewed through a cultural lens (Van IJzendoorn & Kroonenberg, 1988; Sümer, 2024). In collectivist societies, the balance of autonomy and relatedness differs significantly from Western models (Kagitcibasi, 2005). Researchers like El-Menouar and El-Menouar (2024) note that in non-Western cultures, what might be classified as "anxious" in the West may actually be a culturally adaptive form of interdependence.

In the Indian context, the interplay between traditional values and modernization creates a complex backdrop for romantic relationships (Chaudhary, 2024). Recent studies by Ashaq and Singh (2024) and Kaur (2024) confirm that while secure attachment remains a primary predictor of fulfillment, Indian young adults prioritize family harmony and emotional intelligence (Mohindra & Azam, 2024). In urban centers, marital satisfaction is increasingly tied to emotional intimacy (Sarin & Gupta, 2023) and the specific conflict management styles adopted by millennials (Kumar & Singh, 2024). As relational patterns shift due to modernization, attachment security remains essential for mental health (Dutta & Raj, 2023; Umadevi et al., 2024). For those with insecure styles, clinical interventions such as Schema Therapy (Young et al., 2003) or Emotionally Focused Therapy (Johnson, 2004) are often required to move from negative internal models toward secure, satisfying connections.

Methodology

Research Design

The present study employed a quantitative, non-experimental research design using a correlational approach. This design was selected to objectively measure the strength and direction of the relationship between adult attachment orientations and romantic relationship satisfaction.

Research Questions

The study sought to address the following primary questions:

What are the prevalent attachment styles among young adults?

To what extent do these styles correlate with romantic relationship satisfaction?

Are there significant gender-based differences in attachment expression and satisfaction?

Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this research are as follows:

To identify and categorize the attachment styles of young adults currently engaged in romantic relationships.

To assess and quantify the level of relationship satisfaction among these individuals.

To determine the statistical relationship between specific attachment styles and the quality of relationship satisfaction.

To analyze potential gender-based differences in attachment behaviors and satisfaction levels.

Hypotheses

H1: There will be a statistically significant relationship between secure attachment style and romantic relationship satisfaction.

H2: There will be a statistically significant negative association between anxious or avoidant attachment styles and romantic relationship satisfaction.

H3: There will be no statistically significant gender differences in attachment styles or romantic relationship satisfaction.

Participants and Sampling

A sample of 47 young adults (N=47; 29 males, 18 females) was recruited using purposive and convenience sampling methods. Participants were aged between 18–30 years, a developmental stage identified as "emerging adulthood," where romantic bonds are central to psychosocial identity. Inclusion criteria required participants to have current or prior experience in romantic relationships.

Research Tools

The study utilized three standardized instruments for data collection:

The Experiences in Close Relationships-Relationship Structures (ECR-RS): Developed by Fraley et al. (2011), this tool assesses attachment across dimensions of anxiety and avoidance using a 7-point Likert scale.

Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS): Developed by Hendrick (1988), this 7-item Likert scale measures global relationship satisfaction. Its high reliability made it suitable for calculating the Pearson correlation coefficient.

Demographic Questionnaire: A custom tool used to record age, gender, and relationship history.

Data Collection and Ethical Considerations

Data were collected via digital surveys (Google Forms) following the attainment of informed consent. Ethical standards were maintained by ensuring participant anonymity, confidentiality, and the right to voluntary withdrawal. The study adhered to the professional guidelines established by the Institutional Ethics Committee.

Data Analysis

Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Descriptive statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation) summarized demographic data. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient (r) was employed to test relational hypotheses, and Independent Samples t-tests were utilized to examine gender-based differences.

Results and Discussion

This chapter details the findings regarding the impact of attachment styles on romantic relationship satis-

faction among young adults. The analysis transitions from demographic profiling to hypothesis testing via correlational and inferential statistics.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participants

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	25	53.2
	Female	22	46.8

Note. N=47.

The sample consisted of 47 participants, predominantly representing the "emerging adulthood" stage (89.4% aged 18–25). This demographic is critical for studying the solidification of adult attachment models.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Attachment and Satisfaction

Variable	M	SD
Secure Attachment	5.06	1.32
Avoidant Attachment	2.58	1.14
Anxious Attachment	2.91	1.41
Relationship Satisfaction	3.78	0.94

N = 47; M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation

The data reveals that while the sample generally leans toward security (M = 5.06), there is measurable variance in insecure traits, providing a robust baseline for testing relational correlations.

Hypothesis Testing

H1: Secure Attachment and Satisfaction

A Pearson correlation supported H1 ($r = .64, p < .01$). As secure attachment increases, relationship satisfaction significantly rises, confirming that secure "internal working models" facilitate emotional safety and integrative conflict strategies.

Table 3: Correlation Between Secure Attachment and Relationship Satisfaction

1. Variable	1	2
2. Secure Attachment	—	—
3. Relationship Satisfaction	.64**	—

Note. N = 47. ** $p < .01$.

H2: Insecure Attachment and Satisfaction

Correlational analysis showed significant negative associations for both Avoidant ($r = -.48, p < .01$) and Anxious ($r = -.39, p < .01$) styles. This suggests that "deactivating" and "hyper-activating" strategies serve as consistent barriers to intimacy and fulfillment.

Table 4: Correlation of Insecure Attachment Styles with Relationship Satisfaction

1. Variable	Relationship Satisfaction
2. Avoidant Attachment	-.48**
3. Anxious Attachment	-.39**

Note. N = 47. ** p < .01.

H3: Gender Differences

An independent samples t-test revealed a significant difference in Avoidant Attachment ($t = 2.18, p = .031$), with males reporting higher avoidance. No significant differences were found in other variables, including overall satisfaction ($p = .883$).

Table 5: Independent Samples t-test for Gender Differences

1. Variable	Gender	n	M	SD	t	p
2. Secure Attachment	Male	25	5.01	1.35	-0.42	.671
	Female	22	5.12	1.29		
3. Avoidant Attachment	Male	25	2.72	1.21	2.18	.031*
	Female	22	2.42	1.05		
4. Anxious Attachment	Male	25	2.85	1.45	-0.83	.408
	Female	22	2.98	1.38		
5. Rel. Satisfaction	Male	25	3.75	0.98	-0.15	.883
	Female	22	3.82	0.91		

Note. *p < .05.

Discussion

The results prove that internal working models are deeply influential in emerging adulthood. The strong correlation in H1 aligns with the "Feeling Known" phenomenon, where secure individuals enjoy higher quality bonds through perceived partner responsiveness. For H2, the finding that avoidance has a stronger negative impact ($r = -.48$) than anxiety ($r = -.39$) suggests that emotional distancing is the primary driver of relationship erosion in this sample.

Finally, the gender-based findings (H3) provide support for Socialized Gender Roles Theory, suggesting that Indian men may be conditioned toward emotional stoicism (avoidance). However, the lack of difference in overall satisfaction suggests a state of "Normalized Avoidance," where emotional reserve is culturally integrated and accepted. Collectively, these findings provide a mandate for attachment-based clinical interventions tailored to the shifting landscape of urban Indian relationships.

Summary

The present research investigated the psychological mechanisms underpinning romantic relationship satisfaction through the lens of adult attachment theory. Utilizing a sample of 47 young adults ($N=47$), the study employed the ECR-RS and RAS scales to quantify the relationship between internal working models and relational fulfillment.

The empirical data identified Secure Attachment as the most robust predictor of relationship success ($r = .64, p < .01$), acting as a psychological buffer against relational stress. Conversely, insecure styles were found to be significant barriers to intimacy, with Avoidant Attachment ($r = -.48$) demonstrating a more

detrimental impact on satisfaction than Anxious Attachment ($r = -.39$). A critical gender difference was also uncovered: males exhibited significantly higher levels of avoidant behavior ($p = .031$), suggesting that "deactivating strategies" are a more prevalent coping mechanism for young men in this demographic.

Conclusion

The study concludes that romantic satisfaction is intrinsically linked to the quality of one's emotional security. The findings affirm that internal working models are active driving forces in interpersonal life, dictating how individuals interpret partner responsiveness and manage conflict.

A primary clinical contribution of this research is the identification of male avoidant patterns. This suggests that traditional gender socialization—emphasizing stoicism—manifests in adulthood as emotional withdrawal. Therefore, the focus of clinical intervention should shift from "fixing the relationship" to "restructuring the attachment," specifically targeting the de-stigmatization of vulnerability in men. Ultimately, while attachment styles are rooted in early history, the high statistical significance across all hypotheses ($p < .01$) provides a mandate for therapeutic and educational interventions to foster "earned security" and enhance human connection.

Limitations

Sample Size: The sample ($N=47$) limits the generalizability of the findings across broader cultural contexts.

Cross-Sectional Design: The data represents a single point in time; however, attachment is often fluid and can evolve across the lifespan of a partnership.

Self-Report Bias: Reliance on participant honesty introduces the risk of "Social Desirability Bias," where individuals may inflate satisfaction scores.

Strategic Recommendations

For Future Research: Future studies should adopt a dyadic approach, surveying both partners to observe how "Anxious-Avoidant" pairings interact. Further exploration into the role of digital communication in triggering attachment anxiety is also recommended.

For Clinical Practice: Practitioners should integrate attachment screenings into initial assessments. Targeted workshops for young men focusing on "vulnerability as strength" could mitigate high avoidant scores.

For Education: Implementation of "Relationship Literacy" programs at the university level is essential to help students identify their emotional blueprints and choose more compatible partners.

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