



Attachment Security and Attachment Styles in Romantic Relationships

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ABSTRACT

Purpose. The present research aimed at studying the Attachment Security, Attachment Styles in Romantic Relationships.

Method. Cross sectional research design was used in this study. The sample ($N = 148$) was selected via online poll due to COVID regulations. Non probability purposive sampling technique was used to collect sample. The Ainsworth Security Questionnaire Revisited ASQ- R was used to study attachment security in early childhood and Experiences in close relationships Revised ECR-R Scale was used in this study to evaluate attachment styles in romantic relationships.

Results. Results showed that attachment security was negatively correlated with insecure attachment styles. It was also proved that those who scored low on attachment security measure scored high on either anxious attachment dimension or avoidant attachment dimension.

Novelty/Originality of The Study. The main goals of this study were to develop a warm collaborative therapy connection, identify particular problem sets and associated goals, psycho-educate the participants.

Implications. The study will help how psychotherapy can help those with unhealthy attachment styles to heal and have relationship satisfaction in romantic relationships by identification of insecure attachment styles.

Keywords: Attachment security, attachment styles, adults in romantic relationships

INTRODUCTION

In Pakistani society, ‘marital conflicts’ are considered integral part of relationships and not much work has been done to understand the science of ‘attachment’ in romantic relationships. The understanding of ‘love’ is heavily influenced by print media or electronic media that emphasize on ‘trauma bonds’ rather than ‘healthy relationships. In movies story usually ends when partners get married to each other. What happens afterwards in the real life, there is not much material on it available so the people who are suffering in their romantic relationships because of their attachment styles and wounded past, just chalk it up to ‘fate’ or some resort to other explanations such as ‘black magic’. The aim of this study is to highlight how emotional insecurity in childhood can impact attachment styles that are developed in early age influence adult romantic relationships so the people can explore psychotherapy and heal from their childhood wounds instead of thinking it’s their fate.

Bowlby-Ainsworth Attachment Theory (1979) powerfully explains how attachment security in early childhood the predictor of attachment styles in adult romantic relationships is. According to Attachment theory, an individual's attachment styles in maturity is a replication of his or her attachment pattern in the past, starting with one’s most primitive attachment bond (Fraley, 2002; Rasheed et al., 2021). Bowlby’s major interest was in the interactional styles of families and how it plays out in the development of pathological behaviors and even the development of healthy behavioral patterns. He was also of the view that these maladaptive patterns of interaction and behaviors are actually tactics of survival instinct that is meant to safeguard the child against any person that would count on predatory category.

Attachment theory finds its roots in the combined handiwork of J. Bowlby (1907–1991) and M. S. Ainsworth (1913-1980). Its progressive account initiated in the 1930s, with Bowlby's mounting curiosity in the connection between mother’s demise or attentional deficiency and future character development, and with Ainsworth's interest in security theory (1966). Although Bowlby's and Ainsworth's collaboration commenced in 1950, it moved in to its maximum inventive stage quite after, afterwards Bowlby had articulated a preliminary draft of attachment theory, sketches based on ethology, control systems theory, and psychoanalytic thinking, and once Ainsworth had been to Uganda (Ainsworth, 1967), where she piloted the 1st experimental work on baby–mother attachment styles. She devised the first scientific tool of ‘Strange Situation Test’ (Ainsworth, 2015) to assess attachment styles. Her work is said to be the first ‘Scientific Study of Love’.

Bowlby and Ainsworth work consisted on the attachment styles that have their root in the relationship of primary caregiver and the baby, as this is the first social bonding a child makes and thus sets foundation of how the child might behave in other social and romantic relationships. They also had a keen interest in the biology of these interactions as it is scientifically proven that babies are born with a genetically determined tendency be in close contact with a caregiver person which maybe the adult figure in the nearby surrounding such as mother or father or another caregiver. They both emphasized on the importance on the formation of these bonds and how this interaction takes place as well as the impact it has on the life of the child.

Ainsworth's famous strange situation technique was a specific procedure that was especially designed to assess the child's attachment styles based on his interactions with the primary caregiver. This procedure was done on babies of nine to eighteen months of age. The method is to introduce to the baby to different situations that are likely to elicit a fear or anxious reaction over the course of several days. The situations may include being taken to a room that is not familiar to the child, a strange person that the infant is not familiar with enters the room and the primary caregiver is then separated from the child. Over the course of these events the major focus is how the child reacts and is the primary focus of concern.

Attachment Styles

According to Bowlby (1960), who is a father of Attachment Theory, attachment styles are diverse conducts of interrelating and acting in relationships. Through initial childhood, these attachments related patterns are focused on how offspring and caretakers interrelate. In later life, these attachments related behavioral patterns are the road map to define the way attachment will manifest in adult romantic relationships. There are three basic attachment styles, secure (type B), insecure avoidant (type A) and insecure ambivalent/resistant (type C). A fourth attachment styles called the disorganized was afterwards categorized (Main, & Solomon, 1990; Azim, Dey & Roy, 2021).

From the strange situation procedure these types were found out as the babies who had secure attachment styles tended to be more explorative when the primary care giver was around, and then when the strange person was in the room, they became a little less explorative. When left alone with the strange person they became upset and when the primary care giver would come back, they sought contact and comfort from them.

Those babies who had avoidant attachment styles showed behaviors that showed that they failed to greet their mother but when they did greet their mother, they tended to mix their greetings with avoidance. Then those that had an anxious attachment styles tended to seek comfort from the primary care giver immediately and then show signs of resistance and anger. Both of these attachment styles are not secure attachment styles but rather insecure ones.

Recent researches show that these attachment styles impact romantic relationships. When faced with a conflict situation in an adult romantic relationship there are four methods of reaction that are possible. These may include exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect. It was seen in the study that those who had an insecure attachment style tended to use destructive attitude more than the ones who were securely attached. The insecure ones became defensive very easily and then would react in a destructive pattern. The conflict dealing styles of insecure individuals was seen to be consisting of exit and neglect more while voice was typically the least used method among them. (Stanley et al, 2005).

The *internal working model* of the children with secure and insecure children is vastly different and consists of a child's view of himself and his worthiness. This internal working model was also given by Bowlby and according to him, is based on infant and primary care giver interactions. Off springs that had safe attachment styles tended to have a more optimistically oriented view of their own self as well as the view of the world with psychological images of people as tools that may come as supportive while seeing themselves as deserving of being treated respectfully (Jacobsen, & Hoffman, 1997). Avoidant children view their self as undeserving and undesirable, instigated by a rebuffing principal nurturer (Larose, & Bernier, 2001). Ambivalent children have an undesirable view of their own self and self-image and overstate their sensitive reactions so as to get attention from the caregiver (Kobak et al., 1993).

Attachment Security

Bowlby (J, 2008) defined 'Attachment' as an enduring emotional bond with an important individual that provides grounds for appeasing during distress and relaxes during the difficult periods. The way this affection is delivered has a substantial impact on growth related processes, and is known to be related positive functioning especially such as psychological well-being. Attachment theory accentuates the position of a safe and believing primary caregiver-child connection on growth and welfare.

Attachment security or insecurity both can influence future relationships greatly. Attachment security from childhood can translate to adult relationships in four ways that are labeled as secure, secure, anxious-preoccupied, dismissive-avoidant and fearful-avoidant. These attachment styles each have their own characteristics and are typically correspondent to the styles of attachments in childhood.

Researchers say that individuals with secure attachment styles tend to have high frustration tolerance, have a positive sense of self, the world and the future, they tend to be high achievers and in times of distress generally experience low levels of stress and are able to deal with their surroundings pretty well. These individuals also have good emotional regulations and effective problem solving and a low fear factor. In romantic relationships those who have secure attachment styles tend to be more open to criticism as it is not plagued by fear of abandonment and encourage open and honest feedback. They also show flexibility in change in their relationships and enter in conflict with an open mind in order to solve the problem effectively. They also enjoy being close with their partners and positively view their relationship (Elliot & Reis, 2003).

Those who are of low attachment security are usually of anxious preoccupied, dismissive avoidant or fearful avoidant attachment styles. According to research, when in relationships, the individuals that have anxious preoccupied attachment may show signs of excessive dependence and become very emotionally demanding. Their view of themselves is usually negative and they have a hard time trusting their partners and are always seeking their approval (Rivera C, 2018; Suleman et al., 2021). Buren and Cooley (2002) did research on 253 undergraduate students with insecure attachment styles and found out that as compared to the other insecurely attached individuals those who were anxious preoccupied and fearful avoidant tended to have more psychological pathologies and were more prone to depression and anxiety and other disorders.

Dismissive-avoidant adults generally have a positive view of self but also tend to be very distrusting of others around them which lead them to appear emotionally closed off. They also usually have a poor view of others around them. These individuals also tend to be high achievers but their goal of success obsession is the satisfaction of ego the most. They refrain from emotional closeness. They have high standards of self-independence and religiously stick with them (Carvallo & Gabriel, 2006).

Fearful-avoidant adults show traits of both avoidant and anxious attachment. They also have a negative working model of self which tends to for them to become mistrusting of other people and hence when in relationship they become very uncomfortable while also wanting to experience all of it. This leads them to become closed off and sometimes even suppress their feelings because their self is sometimes viewed as unworthy due to negative self-image (Hazan and Shaver, 1987).

In Pakistani society, most people discard psychology on account of the reason that it's for westernized individualistic society and there is no utility of psychotherapy in our collectivistic society. Consequently, people who are suffering from unhealthy attachment styles do not seek help and feel ashamed for going to therapy. This study will demonstrate a strong link between attachment insecurity in early childhood, and its influence on attachment styles in adulthood romantic relationships so the people can see its relevance in their lives and learn to heal from their unhealthy attachment patterns.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The design of the study was cross sectional design of conducting research. The present study was conducted to assess relationship between attachment security in early childhood and its relation with attachment styles in adult romantic experiences.

Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling strategy was used to collect the sample for the research.

Sample

One hundred and forty-six male and female individuals were included in this study. The sample was taken from social media through online polls from google forms and shared links via Facebook and WhatsApp.

Assessment Measures

Following assessment measures were used in the study.

Experience in Close Relationship Revised Scale ECR-R.

The ECR-R was developed by Kelly Brennan, Catherine Clark and Phillip Shaver in circa 1998. ECR-R takes 7 rating points structurally. It consists of 36 statements. The statements measure 2 things so are in divisions of 18. The half check the construct anxiety related to being attached to someone romantically. Attachment anxiety focuses on amounting the extant of the person fearing romantically oriented counterparts to discard, mistreat or desert them. And to amount the avoidance in romantic relationships, the other 18 items are designed.

Ainsworth Security Questionnaire Revised ASQ-R

Ainsworth Security Questionnaire Revised was developed by Blatzian (1998). This scale has 24 items. The 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly agree to 5=strongly disagree). The Cronbach alpha reliability of this scale was ($\alpha=.78$).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, all the statistical analyses that are applied on data are reported. Different statistical analysis was conducted in order to check the hypothesis. In order to check the demographics, descriptive analysis was run. Reliability analysis was also conducted to confirm the internal consistency of the data. After that Correlation analysis was done in order to check the relationship between attachment security and insecure attachment styles. Regression analysis was run in order to check the predictions about variables.

Table 1

Reliability Coefficients of the Scales Used in the Present Study (N=148)

Variables	K	A	M	SD	Range	
					Actual	Potential
Attachment Security	16	.50	8.35	3.80	0-3	0-48
Insecure Attachment Styles	36	.95	143.1	47.61	1-7	0-252

Note. K= No. of Items, A= Reliability Coefficient, M=Mean, SD= Standard Deviation

Results of reliability analysis in table 1 show that the reliability of attachment styles is quite high and insecure attachment styles is very high.

Table 2

Table Showing Pearson Product Correlations of the Variables

Variables	1	2	M	SD
Attachment Security	-	-.538***	8.35	3.80
Insecure Attachment Styles	-	-	143.1	47.61

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation

Table 2 shows the results of correlation between attachment security and insecure attachment styles which is significant. The negative sign indicated that there is a reverse relationship between attachment security and insecure attachment styles which means that if attachment security is high then there is a decrease in insecure attachment styles.

Table 3

Table showing Linear Regression analysis for the variables Attachment Security and Insecure Attachment Styles of the present study (N=148).

Predictors	B	B	SE
Constant	199.3		8.00
Attachment security	-.87	-.538***	.87
R^2	.28		
F	59.4***		
R	.54		
ΔR^2	.28		

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

The table 3 show that attachment security is likely to predict insecure attachment styles. If a person has a low score on attachment security, then he will also have insecure attachment styles.

Table 4

Table showing Linear Regression analysis for the variables Attachment Security and Anxious Attachment Style of the present study (N=148).

Predictors	B	B	SE
Constant	114.1		4.94
Attachment security	-4.47	-.56***	.54
R^2	.32		
F	68.8***		
R	.56		
ΔR^2	.32		

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

The table 4 show that the results of the linear regression analysis are significant which means that attachment security is likely to predict anxious attachment styles. This indicated that if a

person develops low attachment security there are chances that he may develop anxious attachment styles.

Table 5

Table showing Linear Regression analysis for the variables Attachment Security and Avoidant Attachment Style of the present study (N=148).

Predictors	B	B	SE
Constant	85.1		4.21
Attachment security	-2.26	-.38***	.46
R ²	.14		
F	24.1***		
R	.38		
ΔR ²	.14		

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

The table 5 show that the results of the linear regression analysis are significant which means that attachment security is likely to predict avoidant attachment styles. This indicated that if a person has low scores on attachment security, then there are chances that he may develop avoidant attachment styles.

CONCLUSION

It was concluded in the study that attachment security is highly correlated with attachment styles. Those individuals who scored low on attachment security scored high on the dimensions of either anxious or avoidant attachment styles. There are a lot of factors involved in this. Especially that those who do not have a good relationship with their parents tend to have problems in their romantic relationships. The parental relationships tend to set a pattern in childhood which may reflect in adult romantic relationships. In Pakistan there is little to no awareness of these aspects and people are continually living an unsatisfied life which is leading to psychological pathologies. An awareness needs to be created for the people to seek psychotherapy and learn to heal in order to live a fulfilling life.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The study was conducted on small sample, if the sample of the study enlarges than the research would be able to generalize the findings with more confidence. In Pakistan, there is almost negligible literature available on attachment styles and how they impact romantic relationships. Due to COVID lockdown, the questionnaires were filled via online poll and that may have become

a reason for misrepresentation as the online poll reached a certain crowd. Responses of the participants may have been impacted due to the Lockdown situation as COVID played a role as an unexpected confounding variable. Self-reported measures were used for data collection. Self-reported answers may be exaggerated; respondents may be too embarrassed to reveal private details; various biases may affect the results, like social desirability bias. So, to avoid this bias only those individuals who had taken therapy were included in the study.

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