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Attachment Styles as Predictors of Satisfaction in Close/Romantic Relationship among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

The current study was carried out to identify that how the attachment style (i.e. secure, anxious, and avoidant) experiences, are related to and associate with satisfaction in romantic relationships among young adults. A convenient sample of 253 young adults (121 men, 132 women) between 18 to 30 years ($M= 26.46$, $SD= 3.69$) was recruited for the study. The participants completed an 18 item Revised Adult Attachment Scale (Close Relationships Version) and 07 item Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) to measure attachment styles and relationship satisfaction respectively. The tools were translated using forward-backward translation protocol to ensure the cultural and linguistic relevance. The data was analysed using correlation and Multiple Regression using SPSS version 26. The findings suggested that secure attachment style correlated positively whereas anxious and avoidant attachment styles correlated negatively with relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, results reveal that secure attachment style (0.39 , $p>0.001$) is a positive predictor; while avoidant (-0.34 , $p>0.001$) and anxious (-0.27 , $p>0.001$) attachment styles were concluded to be negatively predicting close/romantic relationship satisfaction. The model in general was found significant that explained 48 percent of the variance in relationship satisfaction. The study contributed to relevant research on the topic since it underscores the significance and role of childhood attachment styles in the romantic relationships of an adult person in south Asian collectivistic culture.

Keywords: Attachment Styles, Satisfaction, Romantic Relationships, Young Adults.

Introduction

One of the significant aspects of adult human experiences is his/her romantic relations. It is the romantic relations which have a notable capacity of influencing the emotional wellbeing, psychological fitness and fulfilment in life of a person (Apostolou, et al. 2023). At the same time, the quality and nature of attachment style a child develops in his/her early years with significant family members is of particular importance. It is the formation of close relationships in early year of a person that determine and reflect on relationship formation, its quality and nature during adolescence and young adulthood. That is the reason that this particular stage of development is often marked as significant when intimate relationships and identity formation are occurring

(Navaneetham & Kanth 2022). It is realised that due to the significance of the psychological mechanism of childhood attachment experiences and formation and its long term role in adult life; level of satisfaction of close relationships i.e. romantic among young adults; the research in this area gained importance (Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Shams 2025).

John Bowlby has been credited to propose the theory of attachment during the 1960s he provided a theoretical ground on how the early years emotional attachment to caregivers shape an individual's relationships as an adult (Fraley, 2002; Horst, Rosmalen, & Veer, 2025). According to Bowlby, human infants inherently feel attached and strive to be near to those who provide protection and comfort particularly in a situation of tension or danger. These early bonding or the attachment experiences pave a path to form cognitive and emotional schemas of attachment; that in turn determine the expectations and behaviours of an individual in terms of close relationships in adult life; however, the later revisionist perspective also contend that the later experience over right the early years attachment patterns and experiences (Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Farley, 2002).

Similarly, Ainsworth in her research presented "one of the major tenets of security theory is that infants and young children need to develop a secure dependence on parents before launching out into unfamiliar situation", (1940). Furthermore, there exist certain patterns of attachment during infancy, i.e., secure attachment, anxious attachment and/or avoidant attachment that are later transferred to adult romantic relationships as claimed by Hazan and Shaver (1987). Their research established that the three categories of attachment orientations that were formed in childhood could be effectively adopted in the determination of the quality of relationships and the contentment in the adult relations as well as the romantic relations (Garrett 2023).

Attachment theory, being one among the most interesting theoretical frameworks in the developmental and social psychology fields; its implications regarding the relationships between people in close or intimate relationships have been found to be extremely broad (Horst, Rosmalen, & Veer, 2025). The role of attachment theory in understanding the relationships between adults, was studied by Hazan and Shaver (1987); "attachment style also impacts how one behaves in romantic relationships (jealousy, trust, proximity-seeking, etc.) and how long these relationships can last". Similarly, Brennan and Shaver (1995) in another study concluded that, "people who have a secure attachment type was positively correlated with one's relationship satisfaction, whereas being either more avoidant or anxious was negatively associated with one's relationship satisfaction".

The western literature on the topic has well-documented the link between the attachment theory and romantic relationship satisfaction. Much literature from European and north American researchers has established that the secure attachment-style has been a strong predictor of relationship satisfaction, commitment, and constructive conflict management. Positive perception towards self and partner, a sense of comfort in intimacy and interdependence and belief in availability and responsiveness towards significant others could be characterised by the secure attachment. Individuals with a secure attachment style were likely to enter into a romantic relationship with an open mind, trust and emotional strength.

On the other hand, anxious attachment was marked with more attention to the relationship details and responsiveness of the partner; excessive worry about rejection and abandonment, and over-emotional preoccupation (Rezaee, Asadpour, Ahmadi & Izanloo, 2025). The anxiously attached individuals could only complain of less satisfaction in the romantic relations due to their

tendency to be jealous, emotional and dependent. Poor relationship satisfaction in several findings was always related with anxious attachment which is characterised by a preoccupation with potential rejection or abandonment (Ahmad, Kaker, Rafi, Bibi & Gul, 2023). The anxiously attached ones were more sensitive to relational cues and ambiguous partner behaviour as a threat and consequently were more likely to be influenced with jealousy, emotional swings, and overreliance on reassurance. These types of behaviour could lead to cycles in the relationships in which the anxiously attached partner trigger the withdrawal or frustrations of the other partner therefore escalating the anxieties of the individuals with regards to being abandoned. The research revealed that couples in which one or both partners were found to be anxiously attached had a lower level of satisfaction and increased conflict and perceived partner support (Bassi, Mancinelli, Spaggiari, Lis, Salcuni & Di Riso, 2022).

The avoidant attachment in its turn was described by the emotion of feeling awkward about emotional closeness, suppression of the need to be attached, and the preference of self-reliance to relational intimacy. The avoidant attachments left people inexperienced with the emotional bonding and they were used to maintaining space in their romantic relationships (Wadhwa, McCoy & Bongar, 2024). The avoidant attachment style was also associated with the shutting down of the attachment and a tendency to diminish the attachment needs and minimize the dependence on romantic relationships (Bretaña, Alonso-Arbiol, Recio, & Molero, 2022). Avoidantly attached people typically claimed that they feel uncomfortable when emotionally close, they like to be on their own, and they cannot be submissive or allow their partners to subjugate them. It was found that avoidant attachment predicted low levels of relationship satisfaction, emotional intimacy, and relationship investment (Aromolaran 2025). The avoidant couples were found to retreat at the time of conflict and also to report less overall commitment, which was also associated with higher rates of dissolution of relationships.

Both, the anxious and avoidant attachment-styles have been found to be poorly predicting the romantic relationship satisfaction. To the extent that occurrence and report of conflict is higher and relationship dissolution is more common among people with anxious and avoidant attachment-styles (Khan, Riaz, & Ali, 2022). The anxious and avoidant dyadic also referred to as the anxious-avoidant trap; it is a very challenging aspect in the life of relationship dynamics that was correlated with the perpetual dissatisfaction (Hughes, Emery, McGorray, Gardner & Finkel, 2024).

Some studies conducted on intersectionality of attachment styles and romantic relationships view the topic with a particular focus on implications or applicability of western culture findings to the non-western societies (Cross & Joo, 2023). Multiple studies conducted on the East Asian populations revealed that the extent of expression and sense of attachment styles was found to be culturally moderated or dependent and meaning of attachment styles varied based on the individual's host culture i.e. collectivism, gender roles expectations, and family involvement in the relationship (Joo, Cross & Sun, 2023; Lee, 2024). Similar argument can be raised in terms of South Asian cultures since they are mostly collectivistic, having strong familial bonds and highly preconceived gender roles (Khalid & Hassan, 2019).

In the same vein the Pakistani socio-cultural environment is collectivistic, traditionally bound to religious and moral values. These peculiarities pose certain challenges to the natural attachment style development among children. The socially expected parenting style, disciplining efforts, lack of emotional expression and absence of attachment from parents all contribute to development

of attachment style among infants. Similarly, young people's expression of their emotional or romantic attachment is also governed by these same collectivistic, traditionally religious and moral values. Balancing between the socially expected and sanctioned and natural / dispositional ideals complicate establishing romantic relationship and also influence the satisfaction associated with it. (Bashir, Khawar & Muazzam, 2025; Khalid, 2023; Khalid & Hassan, 2019).

Moreover, Pakistani sociocultural context has its own versions of romantic relations and intimacy; it is culturally ingrained and socially nurtured. Since the traditional norms remained to exert pressure on the ideals of marriage and companionship, an increasing urbanization, rise in education, and the access to globalized media had gradually transformed these attitudes and patterns of relations of young Pakistani adults. It can be assumed that this socio-cultural factor may have a noticeable role in the romantic relationship satisfaction and development of attachment styles.

The research conducted in Pakistan on the romantic relationships and attachment styles has been very basic in literary and scientific sense. Most of the available studies were structured around marital satisfaction in the setting of arranged marriage, but not on romantic relationships between young adults during premarital stages (Khalid 2023). Available statistics showed that Pakistani young adults were increasingly engaged in romantic relationships prior to marriage and also considering the possibility of looking for a probable match for their own marriage. The aspects such as family respect, gender roles, primacy of the marital over premarital relationships create a peculiar nexus to study attachment styles in relation to romantic relationships in a different context of collectivistic non-WEIRD cultures (Aziz & Naqvi, 2025).

Applicability or manifestation of childhood attachment-style on adult romantic relationships among young people living in global-south in general and to the south-Asian countries in particular still needs further exploration. The hallmark characteristics of i.e. collectivist values, patriarchy; role of head of family; family cohesiveness, preconceived, religious and social constructions of south-Asian cultures paint an extremely intrusting picture of gender roles and intimacy; while all of these have potential to mediate or moderate the attachment style and romantic relationship satisfaction, but to what extent and how strongly is not fully known (Abbas, Aqeel, Ling, Ziapour, Raza, & Rehna, 2023).

Henceforth, there was limited availability of research data on interaction between attachment style and romantic relationships in indigenous context and minimal empirical evidence on the topic under study. Thus, the current research was designed to study scientifically on how the styles of attachment contributed to the later satisfaction in the romantic relationships between young Pakistani adults.

Research Questions

1. Is there a relationship between attachment styles and romantic relationship satisfaction among young adults in Pakistan?
2. How do secure, anxious and avoidant attachment styles relate to satisfaction of romantic relationships among young adults in Pakistan
3. Do attachment styles (secure, anxious, and avoidant) predict romantic relationships satisfaction among young adults in Pakistan?

Research Objectives

1. To explore the relationship between attachment style and romantic relationship satisfaction among the young adults in Pakistan.
2. To test statistically the secure, anxious and avoidant attachment styles and satisfaction in romantic relationship among young adults in Pakistan.

Research Methodology

Research Design

Correlational research design was used to study the relationship between attachment styles and romantic relationship satisfaction among the young adults in Pakistan. The data was collected used cross-sectional survey method.

Participants

The method to select participants for the study was convenient sampling strategy and purposive sampling technique was employed. The principal inclusion criteria were that participants should be actively in a romantic relationship for not less than six months. The sample consisted of 253 (121 men; 132 women) young adults between 18 to 30 years ($M = 26.46$, $SD = 3.69$); studying in three prominent public sector universities in Pakistan. The educational level of participants was from undergraduate to graduate (MS/M.Phil.).

Psychological Measurements

The following psychological instruments were used in the current research study to collect the data from participants.

Revised Adult Attachment Scale (Close Relationships Version) was used to measure the attachment styles as secure, anxious and avoidant styles. The scale is designed to measure generally how important one feel in close relationships in their life. Thinking about their past and present relationships with people who have been especially important to them, such as family members, romantic partners, and close friends. The revised scale is an 18 items self-report measure developed by Collins, (1996). It measures responses on a five-point likert type scale ranging from 1 (Not at all characteristic of me) to 5 (extremely characteristic of me). "It measures adult attachment styles named "Secure", "Anxious" and "Avoidant", defined as: Secure = high scores on Close and Depend subscales, low score on Anxiety subscale
Anxious = high score on Anxiety subscale, moderate scores on Close and Depend subscales
Avoidant = low scores on Close, Depend, and Anxiety subscales. Collins & Read (1990) reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .69 for close, .75 for depend, and .72 for anxiety sub-scales. Test-retest correlations for a 2-month period were .68 for Close, .71 for depend, and .52 for anxiety sub-scales."

Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS)

The relationship satisfaction was determined through the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) developed by Hendrick, (1988). A 7-item scale designed to measure general relationship satisfaction. Respondents answer each item using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (low satisfaction) to 5 (high satisfaction). The higher the score, the more satisfied the respondent is with his/her relationship. It had been described as highly reliable and valid in diverse cultural backgrounds featuring strong internal consistency, cronbach's alpha often > 0.90 , and test-retest reliability ranging from 0.85 to 0.90.

Procedure

Prior to data collection, both the scales were translated using forward-backward translation

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	121	47.2
	Female	132	52.8
Age Group	18-22 years	98	39.2
	23-26 years	90	35.6
	27-30 years	65	25.2
Education	Undergraduate	145	56.8
	Postgraduate	108	43.2
Relationship Duration	6-12 months	77	29.6
	1-2 years	95	38.0
	2+ years	81	32.4

protocol. The two scales were first translated by 03 experts into Urdu language and then by 03 different experts back-translated into English, it was done to achieve linguistic and cultural appropriateness. Then 03 public sector universities were selected to collect the data. Following a verbal and written consent forms filling; the participants were distributed the questionnaires to contribute in the study. The aims and objectives of the research were briefed to them and that their identity and data protection will be the main priority of the research. It was also informed that their responses will be kept anonymous and used for research purpose only, 310 copies of questionnaire were distributed. 268 copies of questionnaire were returned to the researcher's team by the participants. However, 15 questionnaires were rejected because of missing or non-serious response patterns. The SPSS software was used to run analysis on the answers obtained through 253 questionnaires. The data was analysed using the SPSS version 21. The descriptive analysed was done to explain the demographic characteristics of the sample. To explore and ascertain variable interactions Pearson product moment correlation analysis was done. The Multiple regression analysis was done to establish the predictive strength of the attachment styles in the relationship satisfaction of the young Pakistani adults.

Results

Results were analysed using SPSS 21, initially the demographics are presented in table 1.1 while scale reliability is presented in table 1.2. Further for correlation "Pearson Product Moment Correlation" was used and in presented in table 1.3; and for predictive relationship between the study variables "Multiple Linear Regression Analysis" was used.

Table 1.1

Result showed about the percentages and frequency of demographic variables (N = 253)

Note. Frequencies and percentages reflect the distribution of the sample across demographic categories.

Table 1 indicated the demographic profile of the 253 respondents recruited in the study. There was a higher number of female participants (52.8%), as compared to male (47.2%). Most of the participants were between the age of 18–22 (39.2%). Over half of the respondents were undergraduates (56.8%). Most participants reported that they had been in their present romantic relationship from one to two years (38.0%).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Attachment Styles and Relationship Satisfaction (N = 253)

Variable	N	Mean	SD	α	No of Items	Range
Secure Attachment	253	3.87	± 0.72	0.72	6	1-5
Anxious Attachment	253	3.14	± 0.89	0.74	6	1-5
Avoidant Attachment	253	2.76	± 0.94	0.79	6	1-5
Relationship Satisfaction	253	3.65	± 0.81	0.75	7	1-5

Note. SD = Standard Deviation. All variables were measured on a 5-point Likert scale.

The results of the descriptive statistics of all four research variables that were based on a five-point Likert scale are presented in Table 2. The Cronbach alpha score for each subscale is presented, in case of secure, anxious and avoidant attachment styles the α values were 0.72, 0.74, 0.79 respectively. The relationship assessment scale had an α values of 0.79. these values can be considered satisfactory for the indigenous sample since the number of questions in each sub-scale is small. The mean scores for each subscale i.e. secure, anxious and avoidant attachment are M= 3.87; 3.14 and 2.76 respectively. Secure attachment style had a higher mean score than anxious (M = 3.14) and avoidant (M = 2.76) attachment styles which had relatively lower means, which implies that these attachment styles were somehow less common in this sample. The relationship satisfaction had a moderately high mean (M = 3.65).

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Coefficients Among Attachment Styles and Relationship Satisfaction (N = 253)

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Secure Attachment	—			
2. Anxious Attachment	-.31**	—		
3. Avoidant Attachment	-.44**	.38**	—	
4. Relationship Satisfaction	.56**	-.42**	-.51**	—

Note. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed). 1 = Secure Attachment; 2 = Anxious Attachment; 3 = Avoidant Attachment; 4 = Relationship Satisfaction.

The Pearson correlation coefficients between the variables in the study reflected in Table 3 revealed that secure attachment showed a promising positive association with relationship satisfaction ($r = .56, p < .01$), which means that individuals having higher the level of secure attachment style would, have more romantic/close relational satisfaction. Conversely, anxious ($r = -.42, p < .01$) and avoidant ($r = -.51, p < .01$) attachment styles had significant negative relationships with relationship satisfaction, which validates the observation that people having higher levels of anxious and/or avoidant attachment orientations would have lower levels of satisfaction.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Relationship Satisfaction from Attachment Styles (N = 253)

Predictors	B	SE	β	p-value
Secure Attachment	0.48	0.07	.39	< .001
Anxious Attachment	-0.31	0.06	-.27	< .001

Avoidant Attachment	-0.44	0.08	-.34	< .001
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Note. $R^2 = .48$, Adjusted $R^2 = .47$, $F(3, 249) = 73.62$, $p < .001$

Note. B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; β = standardized regression coefficient. $R^2 = .48$ indicates that 48% of variance in relationship satisfaction was explained by the three attachment style predictors.

Table 4 depicts the findings of the multiple regression analysis of the predictive effects of attachment styles regarding relationship satisfaction. In case of romantic relationship satisfaction, the model accounted for 48% variance in the outcome variable ($F(3, 249) = 73.62$, $p < .001$). Only one of the components of attachment styles i.e. secure attachment style ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < .001$) significantly positively predicted relational satisfaction; whereas anxious attachment style ($\beta = -0.27$, $p < .001$) and avoidant attachment style ($\beta = -0.34$, $p < .01$) significantly negatively predicted relational satisfaction.

Discussion

This study was envisaged to explore the association between the attachment style and romantic/close relationship satisfaction of young adults in the collectivistic, non-WEIRD, indigenous context. The descriptive analyses of the data collected. It was assumed that the three attachment styles i.e. secure, anxious and avoidant would be associated with romantic/close relationship satisfaction among the young adults. Moreover, it was also investigated that attachment styles would have a predictive role in case of romantic/close relationships.

Descriptive analyses show that young adults are quite involved in romantic relationships; and they were open to discuss about it. It is observed that socio-cultural transition in indigenous society has been prominent, young people are found more frequently involved in long-term romantic relationships and they are also more vocal and assertive about making their own relationship choices.

Consistent with the existing evidence on the topic, secure attachment emerged as an important positive predictor of romantic/close relationship satisfaction among young Pakistani adults. The positive association between secure attachment and relationship satisfaction also indicates that people who experience secure attachment during childhood grow up to become people who engage in free communication, emotional restraint and effective conflict management, which leads to a gratifying relational experience as well. The results of different studies conducted have concluded that a positive fulfilling outcome of a romantic relationships is closely connected to secure attachment in childhood. Those who experience securely attached childhood were actually believed to enjoy more satisfaction with close relationships, emotional closeness, effective communication and less conflict as compared to their insecurely attached peers. The studies conducted in Western context found out that the securely attached adults were more likely to trust their partners, more commitment towards their relationships and more adaptive to their stressors in relationships (Yilmaz & Lajunen et al. 2023; Watkins & Beckmeyer, 2024).

The results of the current study reflect clearly that young people who possess anxious and avoidant attachment styles experience lesser relationship satisfaction in their close/romantic relationships. This could be due to excessive fear of rejection, consistent need for validation and approval-seeking behaviour. Such feelings make close/romantic relationships a continuous struggle full of emotional labour for both the partners, hence the relational satisfaction is compromised. A meta-analysis conducted by Bao, Li, Zhang, Tang and Chen (2022) synthesised

53 articles and found that the anxious and avoidant attachment styles both predict emotional issues among young people, what's more interesting is that both attachment experience do so concurrently and longitudinally.

The statistical analysis showed that anxious and avoidant attachment styles were negatively associated and predicted the relational satisfaction, these findings are in line with previous studies conducted in Middle East by Mikulincer (1998), in United States by Kim, Weinstein and Selman (2017); and a meta analyses of 53 studies by Bao, Li, Zhang, Tang & Chen, (2022), here it is interesting to note that the current findings are from south Asian, collectivistic social context. Similarly, the anxiety attachment style showed a negative correlation with close/romantic relationship; similar results were also reported by Stackert and Bursik (2003). Furthermore, avoidant attachment style showed a negative association in the indigenous sample with close/romantic relationships; which is similar to conclusions drawn by Hadden, Smith and Webster, (2014) in case of a western sample. Moreover, the unfavourable effects of avoidant attachment were in line with findings that people with avoidant attachment style have behavioural pattern of emotional distancing and avoid being involved in an intimate relationship. They create an emotional buffer and do not let other get too intimate. These results meant that despite the cultural peculiarities of the Pakistani society, the relational implications of the attachment orientations worked in general pattern that correspond with the data and results of western findings.

The other issues that researchers were interested in were the moderation of cultural variables like collectivism, gender norms, and religious values in attachment-satisfaction relationship in Pakistani adults. However, these need more scientific evidence to draw conclusive assertions.

Implications

It is suggested that attachment-informed modules need to be included into the mental health and relationship education so that young adults could be able to recognize the significance of role of attachment needs and styles of young children. Future studies must make use of longitudinal designs; whereby more heterogeneous geographic and socioeconomic sample sizes ought to be included to enhance generalizability.

Conclusion

The present study contributed to empirical evidence in the explanation of the association between the attachment styles and their role in determining the level of romantic relationship satisfaction among young adults in Pakistan. The findings supported the hypothesis that secure attachment was a positive predictor whereas anxious and avoidant attachment styles were significant negative predictors of association between relationship satisfaction and the styles. The three attachment dimensions accounted for a high level of variance in relational satisfaction hence showing that they are explanatory in the indigenous context. Such results proved the cross-cultural validity of the attachment framework proposed by Bowlby and Ainsworth and demonstrated that the framework applies to the indigenous sociocultural setting. The study also revealed the need for high priority of early relational experience in case of the formation of the quality of adult relationships in general and romantic/close in particular.

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