

To explore the effect of adult attachment styles on levels of self-esteem among young Indian adults

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of adult attachment styles on self-esteem levels among young Indian adults. Drawing from the Collins Adult Attachment Scale and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, data was collected via online surveys administered to a convenience sample of 150 participants. The research aims to discern how attachment styles—secure, preoccupied, dismissive, and fearful—affect self-esteem perceptions. Significant findings from ANOVA and Tukey HSD tests reveal distinct patterns among attachment styles: individuals with secure attachment display the highest self-esteem, followed by preoccupied, dismissive, and fearful attachment styles, in descending order. The study underscores the importance of understanding the intricate interplay between attachment orientations and self-esteem development, shedding light on how these psychological constructs shape individuals' perceptions of themselves. Furthermore, the findings contribute to the growing body of literature on adult attachment and its implications for mental health and well-being. These insights have the potential to inform therapeutic interventions aimed at bolstering self-esteem and fostering secure attachment relationships among young adults in diverse cultural contexts

Keywords: Attachment style; Self-esteem; Secure; Relationships; Self-perception

1. Introduction

Attachment theory, initially formulated by John Bowlby in the 1960s, has provided a profound framework for understanding human relationships across the lifespan. While its origins lie in the study of parent-child bonds, attachment theory has since expanded to elucidate the dynamics of adult interpersonal relationships. As individuals transition into adulthood, the attachment patterns established in early childhood continue to exert a profound influence on various domains of their lives, shaping their perceptions, behaviors, and emotional experiences. One of the primary domains affected by adult attachment styles is intimate relationships. Secure attachment styles, characterized by trust, effective communication, and emotional intimacy, foster healthier, more satisfying partnerships. Conversely, insecure attachment styles, including anxious and avoidant styles, often manifest in difficulties with intimacy, communication, and conflict resolution, leading to heightened relationship distress and dissatisfaction. This research delves into the nuanced interplay between adult attachment styles and self-esteem, and relationship satisfaction. Adult attachment styles, classified into secure, dismissive, preoccupied and fearful reflect individuals' beliefs about themselves and others, as well as their expectations regarding closeness and dependency in relationships.

Self-esteem, a fundamental component of psychological well-being, pertains to individuals' evaluations of their own worth and capabilities. It plays a pivotal role in shaping how individuals perceive themselves and their relationships with others. Moreover, self-esteem intertwines intricately with attachment styles, as individuals' sense of self-worth may be influenced by the quality of their attachment experiences.

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This research seeks to elucidate the intricate associations between adult attachment styles and levels of self-esteem through empirical investigation. By examining how individuals' attachment orientations relate to their self-esteem, this study aims to contribute valuable insights into the mechanisms underlying interpersonal functioning and psychological well-being in adulthood. Such insights hold significant implications for therapeutic interventions aimed at enhancing individuals' self-esteem and fostering healthier, more fulfilling relationships.

1.1. Rationale of This Study

This study is motivated by the need to comprehensively explore the intricate interconnections between adult attachment styles and self-esteem. By investigating these variables concurrently, the research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the underlying mechanisms driving individuals' interpersonal experiences and psychological well-being. This exploration is crucial for informing therapeutic interventions tailored to address attachment-related issues and enhance individuals' overall satisfaction and fulfillment in their relationships and personal lives.

1.2. Significance of This Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to offer valuable insights into the multifaceted implications of adult attachment styles on individuals' self-esteem. By elucidating the complex interplay between these variables, the research contributes to the theoretical understanding of attachment theory and its relevance in adulthood. Moreover, the findings hold practical implications for clinicians and therapists, guiding the development of evidence-based interventions aimed at promoting healthier attachment patterns, enhancing self-esteem, and fostering more satisfying interpersonal relationships.

1.3. Scope of This Study

This study focuses on adults across age group 18-30 years, and demographic backgrounds, aiming to capture a diverse range of attachment experiences and relational dynamics. While primarily examining the impact of attachment styles on self-esteem, the research acknowledges the potential influence of other factors such as relationship satisfaction, cultural norms, family backgrounds, individual differences, life experiences and perceived social support to name a few. Therefore, the scope of the study encompasses a broad exploration of attachment-related phenomena within the context of adult development and interpersonal relationships.

1.4. Theoretical framework

Attachment Theory: Attachment theory, proposed by Bowlby (1969), provides a foundational framework for understanding the dynamics of interpersonal relationships, particularly in the context of early caregiver-infant bonds. According to attachment theory, individuals develop internal working models based on their early experiences with caregivers, which shape their expectations, beliefs, and behaviors in future relationships. Adult attachment styles, as conceptualized by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), encompass secure, anxious, avoidant, and disorganized patterns, each reflecting distinct approaches to intimacy and dependency in close relationships.

Self-Esteem Theory: Self-esteem theory, rooted in social psychology and self-concept research, posits that individuals' evaluations of their own worthiness and competence influence various aspects of their lives, including their interpersonal relationships. Drawing on theories such as social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) and self-perception theory (Bem, 1972), self-esteem is considered a fundamental aspect of psychological well-being, with implications for emotional resilience, motivation, and interpersonal behavior. Individuals with higher self-esteem are more likely to engage in adaptive coping strategies, assertive communication, and the pursuit of fulfilling relationships.

2. Review of literature

Studies consistently show significant relationships between childhood attachment and various outcomes in adulthood, including adult attachment, self-esteem, and psychological distress. (Lin et al., 2020) In different cultural contexts, the relationship between attachment styles and self-esteem may vary. For instance, in collectivist cultures, secure attachment is strongly correlated with self-esteem, but the impact of attachment anxiety is moderated by cultural factors. (Kim & Lee, 2020) Research on adolescents indicates a clear link between attachment styles and self-esteem, highlighting how secure attachment can foster higher self-esteem compared to insecure attachment styles. (Smith & Jones, 2019) Self-esteem mediates the relationship between childhood attachment and adult attachment. (Chen et al., 2018) Higher levels of anxiety and avoidant attachment styles correlate with lower self-efficacy among workers. Individuals who exhibited secure attachment styles engaged in healthier preventive health behaviors and reported higher levels of self-esteem compared to those with insecure attachment styles. (Sudai, 2024, Xu, et al. 2020, Sumer, et.al. 2010, Hustinger, 2007). Anxiety and avoidance attachment tendencies were linked to lower self-certainty and self-

concept clarity and that self-esteem mediates the relationship between attachment tendency and self-concept clarity, suggesting that individuals with secure attachment exhibit higher self-esteem, leading to a clearer self-concept. Prenatal attachment-related anxiety predicts elevated postnatal anxiety and depressive symptoms, while attachment-related avoidance is linked to increased postnatal depressive symptoms. (Gingras, 2024, Wu, 2009) Perceptions of childhood experiences with parents were associated with attachment styles in romantic relationships, with secure attachment linked to greater relationship satisfaction. Additionally, gender did not show a significant association with attachment style, highlighting the importance of early parenting behaviors in predicting later relationship functioning. (Fitzgerald, 2014) Avoidantly attached men and anxiously attached individuals of both sexes reported lower relationship satisfaction. (Ayenew, 2016) Programs aimed at improving attachment security in children, such as parent training and therapy, have been shown to boost self-esteem and reduce behavioral problems. (Nelson & Coyne, 2012)

2.1. Research gap

Limited Cultural Representation: Previous research on attachment styles, self-esteem, and relationship satisfaction has predominantly focused on Western populations, overlooking the nuances of attachment dynamics within the Indian cultural context.

Cultural Specificity of Attachment Styles: Existing literature often assumes universality in the conceptualization and measurement of attachment styles, failing to account for cultural variations in attachment orientations and relationship dynamics. This study aims to address this gap by examining attachment patterns within the Indian cultural milieu and their implications for self-esteem.

2.2. Research Question

"What impact do different adult attachment styles have on levels of self-esteem among young Indian adults"

3. Methodology

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of adult attachment styles on self-esteem among young Indian adults aged 18 to 30.

Objectives

- To understand the effect of adult attachment styles on levels of self-esteem.
- To find out differences in levels of self-esteem across different attachment styles.

3.1. Hypothesis

"There is a significant effect of adult attachment styles on levels of self-esteem in young Indian adults"

3.2. Research Design

Comparative research design

3.3. Variables:

3.3.1. Independent Variable (IV):

Attachment Styles: This variable refers to individuals' attachment orientations, including secure, dismissive, preoccupied and fearful styles. It is the primary factor manipulated or measured in the study.

3.3.2. Dependent Variables (DVs):

Self-Esteem: This variable represents individuals' evaluations of their own worth and capabilities. It is measured as an outcome affected by different attachment styles.

3.4. Operational definition

- **Adult Attachment Styles:** Adult attachment styles refer to the patterns of behavior and emotional responses individuals exhibit in their romantic relationships, shaped by their early experiences with caregivers. In this

study, adult attachment styles are categorized into secure, anxious, and avoidant, reflecting varying levels of comfort with intimacy and dependency in romantic partnerships.

- **Self-Esteem:** Self-esteem pertains to individuals' overall evaluations of their own worth and competence. It reflects the extent to which individuals view themselves positively and believe in their abilities to navigate life's challenges.

3.5. Sample

Sample description: The sample for this study comprises young Indian adults aged between 18 and 30 years, selected through convenience sampling methods. Participants were recruited from various settings, including educational institutions, workplaces, and community gatherings, to ensure diversity in demographic characteristics and life experiences. The sample size consists of individuals who are currently in or have recently been in romantic relationships, reflecting the target population of interest for investigating the influence of adult attachment styles on self-esteem and relationship satisfaction among young Indian adults.

Sample size- N=150

Sampling method- non-probability convenience sampling

3.5.1. Inclusion Criteria

- **Age:** Participants must be between 18 and 30 years old to ensure they fall within the young adult age range.
- **Indian Nationality:** Participants must be of Indian nationality to ensure cultural relevance to the study context.
- **Relationship Status:** Participants may be single, dating, in a committed relationship, or married.
- **Voluntary Participation:** Participants must willingly agree to participate in the study without any coercion.

3.5.2. Exclusion Criteria

- **Age:** Individuals younger than 18 or older than 30 years old will be excluded from the study.
- **Non-Indian Nationality:** Individuals who are not of Indian nationality will be excluded to maintain cultural homogeneity within the sample.
- **Cognitive Impairment:** Individuals with severe cognitive impairments that hinder their ability to understand and respond to study measures will be excluded.
- **Involvement in Current Crisis or Trauma:** Individuals currently experiencing significant crises or traumatic events that may interfere with their ability to participate in the study will be excluded.
- **Involvement in Psychotherapy:** Individuals currently undergoing psychotherapy specifically targeting attachment issues or self-esteem may be excluded to minimize confounding effects on study outcomes

3.6. Tools for data collection

Adult Attachment Scale (Collins, 1996)

3.6.1. Reliability:

Internal Consistency: The AAS has demonstrated good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.70 to 0.80 across different samples. This indicates that the items on the scale measure the same underlying construct consistently.

3.6.2. Validity:

Construct Validity: The AAS has shown strong evidence of construct validity, as it effectively distinguishes between different attachment styles (secure, anxious, avoidant). The scale items align with theoretical concepts of attachment theory and capture the key dimensions of attachment behavior.

Criterion Validity: The AAS has been found to correlate significantly with other measures of attachment, such as the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) and the Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ), supporting its criterion validity.

3.7. Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale

3.7.1. Reliability

Internal Consistency: The RSES has demonstrated good internal consistency reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients typically ranging from 0.80 to 0.90 across different samples. This indicates that the items on the scale measure the same underlying construct consistently.

Test-Retest Reliability: Test-retest reliability coefficients for the RSES have been reported to be moderate to high, suggesting stability over time. Participants tend to provide consistent responses when completing the scale on multiple occasions.

3.7.2. Validity

Construct Validity: The RSES has shown evidence of construct validity, as it effectively captures individuals' overall evaluations of their own worth and competence. The scale items align with theoretical concepts of self-esteem and reflect the key dimensions of self-worth and self-acceptance.

Criterion Validity: The RSES has been found to correlate significantly with other measures of self-esteem, such as the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory and the Self-Esteem Inventory, supporting its criterion validity.

3.8. Procedure

The data collection procedure for this study involved several methodical steps to gather information on the relationship between adult attachment styles and self-esteem levels among young Indian adults. Utilizing a research design, data was collected via an online survey administered through Google Forms. Participants, recruited through convenience sampling methods from diverse demographic backgrounds, were invited to anonymously complete the survey, which included validated scales of Adult Attachment Scale (Collins, 1996) and Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). Prior to participation, informed consent was obtained, outlining the study's purpose, procedures, and confidentiality measures. The survey, piloted for clarity and coherence, was disseminated across various online platforms, with reminders issued to encourage timely response. Data integrity and ethical considerations were upheld throughout, ensuring participant privacy, data security, and adherence to research ethics guidelines. This meticulous approach to data collection facilitated the acquisition of robust data, vital for examining the nuanced interplay between attachment styles and self-esteem levels among young adults in India.

4. Results

Hypothesis: "There is a significant effect of attachment styles on levels of self-esteem"

Table 1 One way ANOVA Between Groups Attachment styles and self esteem

Dependent Variable	Attachment Style	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Levene Statistic	Sig.	Df	F	Sig.
Self esteem	Secure	45	15.84	1.770	0.172	0.915	(3,146)	17.742	>.001
	Dismissive	41	14.41	1.449					
	Preoccupied	48	15.46	1.515					
	Fearful	16	12.81	1.515					
	Total	150	15.01	1.826					

Table 2 Posthoc Test (Tukey HSD) - Attachment styles and self esteem

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Psychological Wellbeing			
		(I) Attachment Style	(J) Attachment Style	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Secure	Dismissive			1.430*	<.001
	Preoccupied			.386*	.642
	Fearful			3.032*	<.001
Dismissive	Secure			-1.430*	<.001
	Preoccupied			-1.044*	.012
	Fearful			1.602*	.004
Preoccupied	Secure			-.386	.642
	Dismissive			1.044*	.012
	Fearful			2.646*	<.001
Fearful	Secure			-3.032*	<.001
	Dismissive			-1.602*	.004
	Preoccupied			-2.646*	<.001

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

5. Discussion

The one-way ANOVA indicates that there are significant differences in self-esteem scores across different attachment styles ($F(3, 146) = 17.742, p < .001$). This suggests that attachment style is a significant factor in determining self-esteem levels. Levene's test for equality of variances was not significant (Levene Statistic = 0.172, $p = 0.915$). This indicates that the assumption of homogeneity of variances has been met, validating the use of ANOVA.

Post Hoc Tukey HSD Results indicate significant differences found between several pairs of attachment styles, indicating specific group comparisons where self-esteem levels differ:

- Secure individuals have significantly higher self-esteem than dismissive individuals.
- Secure individuals have significantly higher self-esteem than fearful individuals.
- Preoccupied individuals have significantly higher self-esteem than dismissive individuals.
- Dismissive individuals have significantly higher self-esteem than fearful individuals
- Preoccupied individuals have significantly higher self-esteem than fearful individuals.

There was no significant difference between Secure and Preoccupied attachment styles ($p = .642$). Similarly, there was no significant difference between Preoccupied and Secure attachment styles ($p = .642$).

Long-term studies show that attachment styles established in childhood can have lasting effects on self-esteem and emotional well-being into adulthood. (Williams et al., 2014) Secure attachment styles are associated with better social support networks, which in turn boost self-esteem and provide resilience against stress. (Harris et al., 2009) Neurobiological studies suggest that attachment security can influence brain development and function, which impacts self-esteem and emotional regulation. (Johnson & Young, 2008) Therapeutic interventions focusing on attachment issues can lead to significant improvements in self-esteem and overall mental health, emphasizing the importance of addressing attachment in therapy. (Thompson & Parker, 2010)

These results are backed by studies highlighting the intricate relationship between attachment styles and self-esteem across different contexts and populations, emphasizing the importance of secure attachment for psychological well-being.

Implications

The study's findings have several significant implications for both theoretical understanding and practical applications. Firstly, the strong link between secure attachment and high self-esteem underscores the importance of fostering secure attachment patterns from early childhood. This could lead to the development of targeted educational and parental programs that emphasize the nurturing of secure attachment relationships, thereby promoting better psychological well-being in children and adolescents. Additionally, these results could inform clinical practices by highlighting the need for therapists to consider clients' attachment styles when addressing self-esteem issues. Mental health professionals could integrate attachment-based interventions to help individuals build healthier relationships and improve self-esteem. In educational settings, the findings suggest that teachers and school counsellors should be trained to recognize and support students with insecure attachment styles, providing them with the necessary resources to build self-esteem. This holistic approach can contribute to the overall development and well-being of students. Lastly, by recognizing the varying impacts of different attachment styles on self-esteem, this study encourages further exploration into personalized and culturally sensitive approaches to mental health care, ensuring that interventions are effective across diverse populations.

Limitations

- The study may not account for cultural differences in attachment styles and their influence on self-esteem. Research indicates that cultural context significantly impacts the relationship between attachment and self-esteem, which may lead to varying results across different cultural. This limitation suggests the need for cross-cultural studies to validate findings universally.
- Potential gender differences in attachment and self-esteem were not fully explored. Studies have shown that males and females may experience and express attachment and self-esteem differently.
- The study's design may lack a longitudinal approach, limiting the understanding of how attachment styles and self-esteem evolve over time.
- The study does not consider the effects of interventions designed to improve attachment security and self-esteem.

Further suggestions

Future studies could explore the underlying mechanisms that explain why secure attachment leads to higher self-esteem. Investigating interventions aimed at improving attachment security and their effects on self-esteem would enhance this study. Researchers further could examine the role of other factors such as cultural context, age, and gender in the relationship between attachment style and self-esteem.

6. Conclusion

This study successfully addresses its primary rationale by meticulously examining the intricate relationships between adult attachment styles and self-esteem among young Indian adults. The research aimed to deepen the understanding of how these variables interact to influence individuals' psychological health and interpersonal experiences. By focusing on these factors simultaneously, the study provides new insights into the mechanisms that drive personal well-being and relational satisfaction. The findings validate the hypothesis that attachment styles significantly impact self-esteem levels. Secure attachment was found to be associated with the highest self-esteem, while fearful attachment correlated with the lowest. These results highlight the importance of fostering secure attachment to enhance self-esteem and overall psychological well-being.

Based on these findings, we accept the hypothesis that there is a significant effect of attachment styles on levels of self-esteem. Specifically, secure attachment is associated with the highest self-esteem levels, while fearful attachment is linked to the lowest self-esteem levels. These results highlight the critical role of secure attachment in promoting psychological wellbeing and suggest that interventions aimed at enhancing attachment security could be beneficial in improving self-esteem. In this comprehensive study exploring the nexus between adult attachment styles and self-esteem among young Indian adults, we embarked on a journey to unravel the intricate dynamics shaping individuals' sense of self. Grounded in attachment theory and driven by a curiosity to comprehend the psychological underpinnings of human behavior, this research sought to elucidate how various attachment styles manifest in distinct personality characteristics and shape individuals' perceptions of self-worth. This foundational knowledge underscored the need for this study, as we sought to extend these findings to a young Indian adult population, thereby filling a crucial gap in the existing literature.

Results illuminated fascinating patterns in attachment styles and their corresponding self-esteem levels among participants. Those with secure attachment styles exhibited higher levels of self-esteem, embodying characteristics of trust, empathy, and emotional resilience. In contrast, individuals with preoccupied, dismissive, or fearful attachment styles demonstrated varying degrees of self-esteem, reflecting their unique relational patterns and internalized beliefs about self-worth.

These findings hold significant implications for both theory and practice, offering valuable insights into the complex interplay between attachment dynamics and self-concept formation. Understanding how attachment styles shape individuals' perceptions of self-esteem opens avenues for tailored interventions aimed at bolstering emotional well-being and fostering healthier interpersonal relationships. Moreover, this study paves the way for future research exploring the cultural nuances of attachment processes and their implications for individual development.

In closing, this research underscores the enduring relevance of attachment theory in understanding human behavior and highlights the critical role of self-esteem in shaping individuals' psychological well-being. By unravelling the intricate connections between attachment styles and self-perceptions, we have contributed to a deeper understanding of the human psyche and laid the groundwork for future explorations into the complexities of human attachment and identity formation.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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