

Hypothesis

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP ANXIETY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING: MODERATING ROLE OF PARENTAL ATTACHMENT IN ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

Diverse studies have been done to explore the relationship of parental attachment with developmental outcomes in children but very few studies have investigated this phenomenon in adolescence. Adolescence is a much-burdened stage of development that is marked by the physical and psychological transition. For this reason, this research was planned to find out the link of parental attachment with psychological well-being, and interpersonal relationship anxiety in adolescents. Selective school and college students of age range 12 to 18 years ($M=16.07$, $SD=1.77$) were administered with the interpersonal relationship anxiety questionnaire, the flourishing scale and inventory of parent and peer attachment-mother and father forms along with a detailed demographic information sheet. Results of partial correlation, after controlling for the effect of gender, revealed that attachment with mother and father exclusively positively correlates with psychological well-being and negatively correlated with interpersonal relationship anxiety. SEM revealed that maternal and paternal attachment correlate with each other and collectively negatively correlates with interpersonal relationship anxiety and positively with psychological well-being. However, exclusively, only paternal attachment negatively predicted relationship anxiety. One sample t-test revealed that maternal attachment is perceived as secure, across genders as compared to the paternal attachment. *ASEAN Journal of Psychiatry, Vol. 23(2) February, 2022; 1-10.*

Keywords: Parental Attachment, Well-Being, Anxiety, Adolescence

Introduction

Attachment theory provides a framework to understand the role of attachment (with significant others) as a predictor of Psychological well-being and interpersonal relationship anxiety. Attachment to parents forms the basis of a child's development. Parental attachment is defined as a "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" This broad-spectrum theory is the most renowned perception of an infant's emotional tie to the parental figure.

This theory explains attachment as a major bond between parents and children that is essential to development and survival. Parents are proved to be of ending significance for the physical and

psychological well-being of their growing children. This role is extended to the development of interpersonal relationships in adolescence. The parental attachment appears to be a significant element for the psychological well-being of individuals [1-3].

Interpersonal relationships are significant for the child to interact with significant people in the family, extended family, and friends.

All this is important if a child receives a gesture of acceptance from parents for their interaction [4,5]. This is described in Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory. Perceived parental rejection induces relationship anxiety through negative

personality dispositions in children. Researchers have found a significant relationship between parental rejection and interpersonal relationship anxiety [6].

Psychological well-being is defined as the development of one's true potential. This is in contrast to the subjective well-being view. Psychological well-being is thought to be the result of a well-lived life and is an important factor in successfully adapting to the environment in an adolescent period.

Several models support the possible role of parenting in the development of psychological well-being [7]. Parental attachment is a very significant component for adolescents to have psychological strengths and cultivate interactions with others. When children have a dearth of secure attachment during their early developmental stages, they are likely to demonstrate deficiencies in exploring the world of interpersonal relationships.

Children's personal internal cognitive models depend upon their relationship with their parents. Secure attachment with the parents predicts greater competence while insecure attachment predicts feelings of inept and unrewarding [8-10].

Early literature on parenting has analysed the consequences of the parent-child relationship. Attachment with parents' stand out as an important social-emotional factor associated with adolescent well-being.

Moreover, parent-child affiliation is built on communication, trust, and lesser alienation which is conceptually called secure attachment which is related to communication and warmth. Those children, whose parents were sensitive and responded appropriately to their child's needs, establish a secure parental attachment and consequently substitute a basic attitude of trust for others [11].

Numerous studies have shown that attachment with parents tends to affect the physical,

emotional and psychological health of individuals.

Love et al. evaluated attachment to parents as a possible explanation of discrepant psychological well-being and concluded attachment as a predictor of wellbeing in young adults [11].

Secure attachment with parents is amongst the remarkable factors prompting the optimum level of well-being in a child.

Parental attachment quality has been linked to certain consequences, such as positive self-esteem optimism and purpose absence of anxiety and despair [12].

There is sufficient evidence of the relationship between parental attachment and well-being in infants and children while the literature on adolescent development is scarce.

Adolescence is a phase of identity searching and if the parental attachment is deficient in this time it affects the development of psychological strengths.

The teenagers start socialization and interaction with society which may be inhibited due to relationship anxiety. This research was planned by looking at the significance of this developmental stage and the literature gap [13,14].

Objectives of the Study

The study was designed to meet the following objectives:

- To explore the link between paternal attachment, psychological well-being and interpersonal relationship anxiety.
- To explore the predictive role of paternal attachment (and also individual attachment with mother and father) for psychological well-being and interpersonal relationship anxiety.
- To explore that with who (mother/father) the adolescents perceive secure attachment.

Conceptual Model of the Study

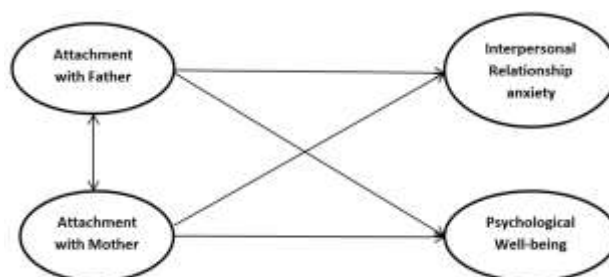


Figure 1. Model of study

In Figure 1 taken all the theoretical and empirical literature together, it was assumed that parental attachment (both with mother and father) will positively correlate with psychological well-being (H1) and negatively with inter-personal relationship anxiety (H2) [15]. It was further hypothesized that parent-child attachment will positively predict psychological well-being in adolescents (H3). Another way round, a good parent-child relationship will stand in many psychological strengths in them. We further hypothesized that parent-child attachment will negatively predict interpersonal relationship anxiety (H4). Both relations were hypothesized

after controlling the effect of gender. It was further thought that there will be a gender difference in the perception of attachment with the parents (H5).

Methodology

This cross-sectional study used a correlational comparative design to reach conclusions.

Research Participants

Data was collected using the purposive sampling technique. Following are the demographic details of research participants (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic details of research participants.

Variables	Total (f)	Sample %	M (SD)
Age in years			16.07 (1.77)
Gender			-
Boys	147	48.5	-
Girls	156	51.5	-
School			-
Govt	150	49.5	-
Private	153	50.5	-
No. of siblings			-
01	94	31	-
04	179	59.1	-
7 & above	30	9.9	-
Birth order			-
First born	104	34.3	-
Middle born	129	42.6	-
Last born	66	21.8	-
Single child	4	1.3	
Family system			-
Joint	185	61.1	-
Nuclear	118	38.9	-
Grade			10.32 (1.37)

Measurement Tools

Following measurement tools were administered to reach study objectives.

- Demographic Information Sheet It is important to consider the influence of socio-demographic variables, such as gender, age, family system, birth order, and the number of siblings while examining the relationship between attachment and well-being in adolescence [17].
- Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment.

This self-report inventory measures parental and peer attachment. The present study used only the parent version. The scale comprises 28 items which measure a global attachment score and three attachment dimensions *i.e.* Trust (the adolescents' belief that parents understand and respect his desires and needs), Communication (extent and quality of participation and interaction), and Alienation (adolescents' feelings of isolation, detachment, and anger experienced in relationship). For evaluation, both total score and subscale scores can be computed depending on the objectives of the study [18].

The Flourish Scale is an eight-item measure of self-perceived success in important areas such as relationships, self-esteem, purpose, and optimism. The scale provides a single psychological well-being score. The scored on the 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree where a high score characterizes a person with many psychological strengths. Diener et al. reported high reliabilities ($\alpha=0.87$, test-retest of a week=0.76) and for the present sample, the reliability coefficient was 0.66 [19,20].

The Interpersonal Relationship Anxiety Questionnaire consists of a list of 9 symptoms of anxiety that individuals feel in the context of interpersonal relationships. There are no reverse items on the scale. Four response options are given for each item *i.e.* almost always true (4), sometimes true (3), rarely true (2), and almost never true (1). Confirmatory factor analysis of the Urdu version showed good fit indices with a single factor *i.e.*, "Interpersonal relationship anxiety" with an alpha ($\alpha=0.93$) [21].

Procedure

The research sample was approached through different schools and colleges of Pakistan after gaining permission from the ethical review board. The institute heads were asked for permission before reaching the research participants. Participants were provided with informed consent and later, those who agreed to continue for the study were administered with The Flourishing Scale Interpersonal Relationship Anxiety Questionnaire and The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment. The scales were administered in a group setting. The research participants were assured about the anonymity of the information and given the right to quit any time during the data collection procedure if they feel uncomfortable [22].

Results

Data analysis was done using Structure Equation Modelling (SEM) in IBM Amos 21 version. The reason to choose this method was to reduce type I error as compared to regression analyses which, simultaneously, put all the equations into the model. However, correlation and comparative analyses were done using SPSS 21 version.

Table 2. Zero-order correlation coefficients for attachment with parents, IRAQ and flourishing N=302.

	IPPA-F	IPPA-M	IRAQ	F total	α
IPPA-F	1	0.41 ^{**}	-0.13 [*]	0.32 ^{**}	0.68
IPPA-M	-	1	-0.23 ^{**}	0.23 ^{**}	0.70
IRAQ	-	-	1	0.03	0.65
F total	-	-	-	1	0.66

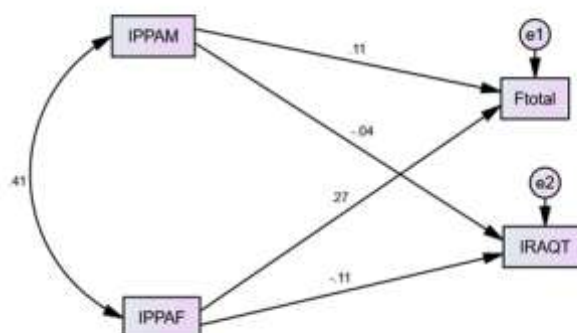
M (SD)	95.6(14.49)	93.10(7.99)	18.96(4.34)	45.70(6.27)	
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Note: **: $P < 0.01$, *: $P < 0.05$, IPPA-F: Paternal attachment; IPPA-M: Maternal attachment; IRAQ: Interpersonal Relationship Quality; F total: Psychological well-being.

In Table 2 partial correlations was computed after controlling for the effect of gender. The correlation matrix showed that high attachment with father and mother correlates with high psychological well-being and lower interpersonal relationship anxiety. However, relationship anxiety and psychological well-being were found uncorrelated with each other.

Path coefficients and overall model fit were estimated by using the maximum-likelihood method for the current data. The following goodness-of-fit indices were used to evaluate the

model: chi-square statistics; χ^2/df ratio, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Goodness-Of-Fit Index (GFI), (SRMR) Standardized Root Mean Square Residual, PCLOSE, and the Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). The model is regarded to have an adequate fit if $\chi^2/df < 5$. For CFI and GFI values greater than 0.90 specify an acceptable model fit. For RMSEA, a value between 0.08 and 0.10 shows a medium and a value below 0.08 shows a good fit. For SRMR, a value < 0.05 and for PCLOSE, a value > 0.05 is acceptable.



Note: IPPAM: Maternal anxiety, IPPAF: Paternal anxiety, F Total: Psychological well-being, IRAQT: Interpersonal Relationship Anxiety.

Figure 2. Standardized path coefficients for the relationship between parent-child attachment, psychological well-being, and interpersonal relationship anxiety while controlling for the effect of gender.

In Figure 2 while looking at the standardized regression weights, separate from combined impact, attachment with father significantly

positively predicted psychological well-being in adolescents.

Table 3. The goodness of fit indices for parent-child attachment as a predictor of interpersonal relationship anxiety and psychological well-being (N=303).

	Cmin/df	RMSEA	RMSEA lower CI	RMSEA higher CI	CFI	GFI	SRMR	P CLOSE
Model	4.26	0.12	0.02	0.21	0.97	0.99	0.03	0.12

Note: C min: minimum discrepancy function, df: Degree of freedom, CFI: Comparative Fit Index, RMSEA: Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, GFI: Goodness Of Fit Index, SRMR: Standardized Root Mean Square Residual.

In Table 3 the goodness of fit indices was fit as per the criteria. The values of RMSEA lie in the marginal but acceptable range. Overall, the model describes that attachment with mother and father correlate with each other which exerts a

combined impact on the psychological well-being and interpersonal relationship anxiety. Results revealed that boys and girls perceived maternal attachment as more secure as compared to the paternal attachment (Table 4).

Table 4. Paired sample t-test for attachment with mother and father for both girls (n=156) and boys (n=147).

	Attachment with parents					
	IPPA-M	IPPA-F		95% CI		
	M(SD)	M(SD)	t	LL	UL	Cohen's d
Boys	63.03(10.18)	55.08(9.20)	-8.65**	-9.77	-6.14	0.82
Girls	61.96 (14.33)	53.94(10.18)	-7.97**	-10	-6.03	0.65

***: p*<0.001

Discussion

The study was done to explore the link between parent-child attachment, interpersonal relationship anxiety, and psychological well-being. The results revealed that attachment with mother and father significantly positively correlated with psychological well-being and negatively correlated with relationship anxiety (H1 and H2) [23]. Results further showed that the unified prediction model was established. It was hypothesized that parent-child attachment will positively predict psychological well-being in adolescents which was approved. The data analysis showed that harmonious relationships with parents (both mother and father) positively predicted psychological well-being in adolescents [24,25]. This hypothesis was approved after data analysis. These findings are supported by Lucktong et al., who have conducted a study on early adolescents and revealed the significance of attachment on psychological well-being and development of self-esteem [26]. Further evidence of support has been given by Smorti et al. who have elucidated the significance of the relationship between parental attachment and well-being. Following few developmental theories e.g. Bowlby's attachment theory, Mandlco resilient system model, and existing empirical literature parent-child relationships, particularly attachment with both parents provide a solid groundwork for individual growth and well-being [27]. The results are also following Bradshaw et al. who argue that bonding between family members

predominantly with parents has been linked with more positive psychological well-being during childhood. The outcomes of Parade et al. have also elaborated the same relationship pattern that secure attachment with parents was positively connected with ease in forming friendships and developing new relations with different races.

There is a small literature on the relationship between attachment and interpersonal relationship anxiety in adolescents. Under the second hypothesis of the study, it was found out that parent-child attachment negatively predicted interpersonal relationship anxiety in adolescents. These findings are supported by Brumariu et al. and who have concluded that hesitant attachment was more steadily related to social anxiety. They have further explored that concurrent attachment, not the earlier attachment predicts anxiety. These findings magnify the previous literature that current attachment relates to psychological strengths [28].

Correlation and regression yielded the same pattern that parental attachment was correlated with social anxiety and psychological well-being but attachment with mother and father did not uniquely predict the dependent variables. However, only father attachment accounted for uniquely positively predicted psychological well-being in adolescents, which is contrary to few earlier pieces of research. Children may naturally be more influenced by the appraisal gained through paternal rather than maternal attachment. The bulk of research on the role of parenting in

relationship anxiety has focused primarily on mothers. This may be due to the inadequate data disposal as mothers take the children to consult for their anxieties and they are more responsive while giving responsive than fathers. This mother dominant model has few issues. Mother and father both make a dynamic family system to raise their children where the absence of the father is compensated by the mother over-protection. A projected view is that strong mothering may be principally a consequence of abstract or “weak” fathering, rather than an exclusive cause of child social anxiety. Since theories about anxiety-enhancing parenting are primarily based on mothering, even if fathers are included in the research, their role is assessed according to a model that does not discriminate between paternal and maternal functions [29].

The 3rd hypothesis stated that there will be a gender difference in the perception of attachment with the parents (H3). The data analyses showed that attachment with mother is thought more secure in adolescent boys and girls as compared to attachment with fathers. This is simply because the mother is involved with the child directly from creation to the discovery of the child’s five senses. The presence of a mother for every child’s matter makes their bond strong and secure. Fathers become less engaged with the children due to their different family roles and become psychologically and emotionally distant from their children [30].

Conclusion

Adolescence is a complex life stage that is extremely affected by parental attachment. Acquiring psychological strengths is the hallmark of this developmental stage which is predicted by the relationship with parents. Due to the transactional stage, adolescents experience relationship anxiety while forming new relations. If that anxiety is not dealt with properly, it affects the psychological well-being of adolescents. Parental attachment positively predicts psychological well-being and negatively predicts relationship anxiety. However, paternal attachment exclusively negatively predicts relationship anxiety. Moreover, both boys and girls perceive their attachment as more secure as

compared to attachment with fathers. Looking at these findings, anxiety interventions may target attachment with parents, especially in adolescents.

Limitation and suggestions

The present sample was derived from a limited area and future researchers must take account of respondents from different areas particularly, people belonging to different socio-economic statuses. There must be some other personal and family factors explored to determine the path of the relationship. At the adolescent stage, secondary attachment is also of importance which should be taken into account. Additionally, the present attachment construct was perceived by the children, future researchers must include parental perspective as well.

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