

Attachment Style in Emerging Adults and its Effect on their Mental Well-being

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the attachment style and its correlation with mental wellbeing in emerging adults aged 18-25. Precisely, it looks to investigate how attachment style affects the psychological well-being of emerging adults. According to attachment theory, early relations between the child and his/her caregiver affect the expectations and behaviour of the child within intimate or close relationships throughout their life. As they grow up to become adults, individual attachment style becomes important to analyse since this is the time that they are exploring serious romantic relationships and look for their significant other. Understanding how their attachment style affects their mental well-being and ultimately the quality of their relationships with others and one self, thus becomes crucial. A sample of 105 emerging adults (aged 18-25) was surveyed using Revised Adult Attachment Scale (Collins 1996) and Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS). With the help of Excel and Jamovi results were calculated and a negative correlation -.547 was found between avoidant and anxious attachment style and mental well-being indicating that unhealthy attachment styles lead to poor mental well-being. Moreover, independent samples t-test was carried out to examine the differences in mental well-being among genders. The results suggest that there is a significant gender difference ($t = -2.84, p = 0.006$) regarding the relationship between attachment style and mental well-being.

Keywords: Emerging adults, Attachment style, Anxious attachment style, avoidant attachment style, Mental well-being

INTRODUCTION

Emerging adulthood has been suggested as a new life stage between adolescence and young adulthood, which lasts roughly from ages 18 to 25. There are five features that make this stage distinctive from others. These are: identity explorations, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between adolescence and adulthood, and a sense of broad possibilities for the future. The stage is more common today than previously because in this age group people pursue higher and higher education, change education qualifications and careers, prepare for higher income jobs, and marry as old as they can because they wouldn't want to regret anything they do when they're older. Also it happens more often in industrialized countries.

Attachment theory was first advanced by Bowlby

(1969), which states that early experience between the child and the caregiver provides a blueprint for how the child would perceive relationships throughout his life. There are various attachment styles but the study primarily focuses on two types of it: Attachment anxious style and attachment avoidant style. An anxiously attached person mostly feels a greater need to be close and accepted by his loved one but very often fears that his feelings are not going to be returned or that his loved one is going to leave them. This attachment style tends to develop from inconsistent caregiving in childhood where the caregivers were sometimes nurturing and sometimes It was unpredictable for the child and neglectful. Avoidant attachment style, on the other hand, tend to value independence and self-sufficiency over emotional closeness with their loved ones. They have learned to

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suppress their emotions and need for intimacy in order to protect oneself from abandonment and neglect. This attachment style usually developed from early experiences with caregivers who were emotionally distant.

As the emerging adult stage is occupied with finding oneself and making a stable romantic connection in pursuit of finding a partner to share life with, understanding attachment style in this stage becomes crucial. The individual attachment style one has is found to be related to their romantic experiences and how stable and positive or negative it is to both of the partners. This can hence have a great effect on their mental well-being that refers to a state of emotional, psychological, social, and cognitive functioning wherein the individual feels positive, healthy, stable, balanced, and capable of handling life's challenges. This means there has been research work carried on attachment styles of children and adolescents over past years; however, the little research about emerging adults due to their new stage; this age stage is seen as coming directly as the product of industrialization, capitalism, and globalization. It is since it's such a recently invented term so much need to have its related aspect on it done research work. In recent years studies have shown how disruptive attachment styles lead to negative well-being and a healthy attachment style leads to positive well-being and more satisfaction with life. We will apply this to the stage of emerging adults to explore the phenomena deeply and relative to this particular stage.

This paper thus aims to explore the relationship between attachment style and mental well-being in emerging adults exploring how attachment styles such as anxious attachment and avoidant attachment style affects how the individual regulates his/her emotions, how socially adjustable he/she is, how well he/she performs in all spheres of his/her life from relationships to dealing with life's problems to feeling a sense of accomplishment and to feeling interested and capable in various life activities and skills.

Objectives:

- To analyse the impact of attachment style (anxious and avoidant) on the mental well-being of emerging adults.
- To examine gender differences in the effect of attachment style on mental well-being of emerging adults.
- To discuss practical implications of current

research and opportunities for further research.

Hypothesis:

- H0** There will be no significant relationship in attachment style and mental well-being of emerging adults.
- H1** There will be significant relationship in attachment style and mental well-being of emerging adults.
- H2** There will be gender difference that has a statistically significant effect on the influence of attachment style on mental wellness among emerging adults.

Rationale:

Emerging adulthood, between ages 18 and 25, is a critical period characterized by significant life transitions that can challenge mental well-being. Attachment styles, especially anxious and avoidant types, have been shown to play a crucial role in shaping emotional regulation and interpersonal relationships. Anxious attachment has been linked to heightened emotional sensitivity and vulnerability to anxiety and depression, whereas avoidant attachment often leads to emotional detachment and loneliness. This research will examine how attachment styles impact mental well-being at this stage of development. Knowledge of these relationships may help to develop targeted interventions aimed at building emotional resilience and helping emerging adults navigate this crucial life phase. Emerging adulthood is the period between 18 and 25 years, marked by a critical transition phase that poses a challenge to mental well-being. It involves, specifically, anxious and avoidant attachment types, having an essential role in regulating the emotions and shaping interpersonal connections. Attachment with anxiety is seen in higher emotional sensitivity and vulnerabilities toward anxiety and depression; conversely, avoidant attachment leads to emotional separation and loneliness. This paper therefore tends to examine how these kinds of attachment influence mental wellbeing within this developmental period. Understanding these relationships can inform targeted interventions to enhance emotional resilience and support emerging adults in navigating this pivotal phase.

Literature Review:

Fraley and Davis (1997) studied attachment formation and transfer in close friendships and romantic

relationships among young adults. Their work surveyed 237 young adults at an American institution to test some aspects of attachment theory. As expected, 60% of the participants considered their parents to be the primary attachment figures, but they were also transferring these roles to peers such as best friends and romantic partners. It showed that the quality of the length of peer relations influenced attachment functions typically shared with parents to be transposed on to peers and that positive aspects of adult relationship attachment such as caregiving, trust and intimate touch were correlates of development. Secure work models, including perceived security for peers supported further the development of adult attachment. The authors proposed further research to understand attachment transfer dynamics in adult relationships.

Mikulincer and Florian (1999) investigated the relationship between spouses' self-reported attachment styles and their perceptions of family dynamics. The sample consisted of 93 Israeli married couples with young children. Both spouses completed attachment style assessments and a family dynamics scale. The results indicated that couples with secure attachment styles also revealed strong correlations between attachment styles and how each spouse idealized or perceived their family dynamics.

Jang *et al.* (2002) looked into communication patterns and relationship outcomes in the event that a romantic partner deceives. Data was obtained from 213 participants who reported deception by a romantic partner. Findings indicated that those who possessed an anxious attachment style avoided discussing the lie; however, those who had secure attachment styles tended to discuss openly. Avoidant individuals were more likely to end the relationship once they found out about the deception. Therefore, these findings suggest attachment styles are a major predictor of communication and the decision to end relationships after deception.

DiTommaso *et al.* (2003) studied the relationship between attachment styles, social skills, and loneliness in young adults. In their study, they assessed the attachment styles, social skills, and loneliness experienced by 183 university students. The results indicated that young adults with secure attachment styles were characterized by better social skills and reported lower levels of loneliness. The study confirmed previous studies linking social competence to attachment security. The study also revealed that social skills partially mediated the

relationship between loneliness and attachment styles, indicating that understanding social competence through the lens of attachment theory can help improve social adjustment.

Morey *et al.* (2013) examined the link between communication technology use and attachment styles in romantic relationships with an online survey. Results of two cohorts of undergraduates from 2009 and 2011 indicated that text messaging and social media use increased over time. The study demonstrated that attachment styles of avoidance are associated with greater email use and less phone and text contact. However, among people with high attachment anxiety, higher usage of social media was related to greater intimacy and support. The study indicated how communication technology might play different roles depending on an individual's attachment style, especially in maintaining intimacy for those with attachment anxiety.

Borhani (2013) discussed the influence of insecure attachment styles on adult relationships and specifically their relationship to substance abuse. The study involved 19 young adults who were aged between 18 and 32 years. This population comprised 9 males and 10 females. The participants undertook a 20-item assessment of their attachment styles and substance dependence. Results indicated a link between the insecure attachment types and substance abuse, therefore, suggesting that early attachment experiences do indeed impact later behavior and coping strategies.

Konrath *et al.* (2014) had a study measuring changes in the course of time on attachment styles with American college students. A widely used adult attachment style measure was employed, and data from 94 samples over some years were used. Their result indicated that the proportion of students with secure attachment styles decreased; however, the proportion with dismissive attachment styles increased. The researchers suggested that this trend, along with declining positive perceptions of others, might be due to societal changes or shifts in college students' experiences.

Honari *et al.* (2015) discuss the relationship between obsessive love behavior and attachment types among Iranian university students. The study consisted of 306 graduate students who were assessed regarding attachment styles and obsessive love behaviors. The researchers found that ambivalent insecure attachment was strongly related to the obsessive love styles, which means the individuals with insecure attachment patterns

are more likely to acquire obsessive behaviors in romantic relationship.

METHODOLOGY

Sample:

In this study, 105 participants participated, who were all between the ages of 18 and 25 years of emerging adulthood. The samples were collected through convenience sampling from the university campuses, community organizations, and other online sources targeting young adults.

Measure/Tools:

Attachment styles were measured by Revised Adult Attachment Scale (Collins and Read, 1990). This part of the study measured attachment anxiety and avoidance of participants to determine their attachment style.

Mental well-being was measured by [the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS) that captured the emotional and psychological state of participants over the past two weeks.

For the data collection, Google survey was used, and Microsoft Excel and Jamovi software were utilized to calculate scores and for the analysis of data.

Procedure:

The study was conducted to investigate the relationship between attachment styles and mental well-being in emerging adults aged 18–25 years. Data collection was carried out using an online survey hosted on Google Forms. Participants were recruited via online platforms, such as social media, university mailing lists, and community forums. A recruitment post briefly outlined the purpose of the study, eligibility criteria, and provided a link to the survey. Before starting the questionnaire, a consent form, informing participants of the research's nature, guarantees confidentiality, and rights to withdraw any time during the survey, was administered to them. People could only proceed after they gave their agreement. The three parts of the questionnaire are as follows: Demographic Details, Attachment Style and Psychological Well-Being. It was approximately 15–20 minutes in length. At the end, participants were thanked for participating, and some contact information for mental health resources was provided so they knew where to go if this caused distress.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results indicate a negative correlation of -0.547 between attachment styles, be it anxious or avoidant, and mental well-being, meaning that the mentally well-being of an individual lowers with insecure attachment styles. This finding is statistically significant, with a p-value of < 0.001, this implies that individuals who exhibit higher levels of anxious and avoidant attachment styles are likely to experience lower levels of mental well-being (Table 1).

Table 1 : Correlation between anxious and avoidant attachment style and mental well-being

N	Pearson correlation between anxious and avoidant attachment style and mental well-being	Significance level
105	-0.547	<.001 Yes

Independent samples t-test was done to examine gender differences in mental well-being. It indicates that the difference in gender is significant at $t = -2.84$, $p = 0.006$ in the association of attachment style with mental well-being (Table 2).

Table 2 : Sample test on male and female's scores

	N	Mean	t value	Significance level (<0.006)
Male	45	58.4	-2.84	58.4
Female	45	62.9	-2.84	62.9

Interpretation:

The findings of the research provide insights into an association between attachment styles and emerging adults' mental well-being. Attachment theory suggests the way early caregiver relationships actually influence an individual's emotional patterns and relational behaviors and outlines a critical framework through which attachment styles may affect mental health during the transitional stage known as emerging adulthood, rife with transitions and identity building. This study focuses on anxious and avoidant attachment styles and their influence on mental well-being, making use of standardized tools for the measurement of attachment and psychological health.

Findings of the current study have critical insights related to the extent of effects anxious and avoidant attachment, respectively, have on mental well-being in emerging adulthood across age range 18-25 years.

The results indicate a negative correlation of -0.547 between attachment styles, be it anxious or avoidant, and

mental well-being, meaning that the mentally well-being of an individual lowers with insecure attachment styles. This finding is statistically significant, with a p-value of < 0.001 , which means that this correlation is highly reliable. In simple words, as anxious and avoidant attachment insecurities increase, mental wellness reduces, thereby proving that the hypothesis of attachment style influences the mental health.

Independent samples t-test was done to examine gender differences in mental well-being. It indicates that the difference in gender is significant at $t = -2.84$, $p = 0.006$ in the association of attachment style with mental well-being. The means scores for men were low than those of women. This, however, falls within the moderate range of mental well-being, with a mean of 58.4 and that of women being 62.9. This means that gender can be related to how attachment styles might have an effect on mental health, where the male could be more prone to effects of insecure attachment on mental well-being as compared to females.

Attachment Styles and Mental Well-Being:

The strong negative relationship between insecure attachment styles - both anxious and avoidant styles - and mental well-being underscores the importance of attachment theory in understanding psychological health within emerging adulthood. Attachment theory suggests that early caregiver-child relationships determine an individual's expectations about future relationships. Emerging adults, navigating romantic relationships and defining who they are, are especially at risk to how these early patterns of attachment play out in adulthood.

Anxious Attachment:

Individuals with anxious attachment in the emerging adult stage often tend to be very emotional and have a fear of abandonment. They have difficulties in trusting others, and their emotional volatility leads to higher levels of distress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. The study's findings fit into this category.

Avoidant Attachment :

Individuals with avoidant attachment style tend to emotionally distance and dislike intimacy. As such, they tend to deny themselves their emotions and will be unable to communicate needs effectively and build close and supportive relationships. Lack of emotional support further enhances the sense of isolation, leading to low mental

well-being.

These results align with previous literature establishing insecure attachment styles as correlates with worse mental health outcomes in those who experience emotional vulnerability, which can be defined by transitions like emerging adulthood.

Gender Differences:

In this research, males had lower mean values of mental well-being compared to females. The findings on gender differences can be accounted for by a couple of reasons:

Emotional Expression:

Research shows that in many cultural contexts, men may be less encouraged to express vulnerability or seek emotional support. This may worsen the impact of insecure attachment on mental health since they may not seek help or emotional validation when experiencing anxiety or depressive symptoms.

Socialization and Gender Roles:

Men could be socialized to suppress emotional needs, valuing self-reliance more than emotional dependency. The suppressive mechanism can also intensify mental maladies since, in most instances, men are less likely to seek social support as women.

However, this finding suggests that the interaction between attachment styles and mental health might be more complex in males, who may not have the same coping mechanisms or emotional expression opportunities as Females, eventually experiencing worse mental health. Later research could delve deeper into this gender difference by examining further moderating variables, like societal expectations or emotional regulation skills.

Practical Implications:

An implication of these findings, to the mental health professional as well as the education programs meant to shape emerging adulthood, could lie in targeting attachment-related behaviours. Intervention can occur along the areas in insecure attachment styles where therapies involving emotional regulation in relationships and securing the establishment of secure attachment styles of romantic attachment are essential aspects in eliminating adverse attachment with anxious or avoidant implications.

For therapists working with emerging adults,

knowledge about the role of attachment in mental well-being can help them make decisions about the course of treatment. Therapeutic approaches such as attachment-based therapy, CBT, and EFT can be used to help individuals with insecure attachment styles to better understand and manage their emotional experiences, thus having a positive outcome on their mental health. Additionally, educational institutions and workplace wellness programs could utilize workshops or interventions on emotional health, attachment styles, and skills for building relationships. It is likely that these programs can further enhance the mental well-being of students or young professionals with respect to navigating adult relationships and self-awareness.

Limitations and Future Research:

Several limitations of the current study would be overcome through future research: Sample Size and Diversity: This study has a sample size of 105. However, a more extensive and diversified sample across cultural, socio-economic, and educational backgrounds will provide greater generalization of findings.

A longitudinal design would be useful in addressing this question by seeing if attachment styles and mental wellbeing are changing over time or only at specific transitional phases like from emerging adulthood into adulthood proper.

Broader mental health measures: including wider mental health measures (for example substance use, self-harm or relationship satisfaction) might contribute more to understanding whether attachments indeed have an influence over all aspects of wellbeing.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the present study highlights that the insecure attachment styles-anxious and avoidant-somehow do have an enormous relationship with lower mental well-being in emerging adults. Also, there were observed differences between the genders. Men showed a higher susceptibility to the destructive effects of an insecure attachment on their mental health. The present results, therefore, highlight the importance of attachment-based interventions in better mental health outcomes. This can be achieved by addressing insecure attachment

patterns, which will enable mental health professionals and educators to better support the psychological well-being of emerging adults during this critical developmental stage.

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