

Exploring the Relationship between Attachment Styles (Secure & Insecure - Ambivalent Type) and Resilience

Nirali Desai^{1*}, Gayathri Balasubramanian²

ABSTRACT

Background: The constructs of attachment styles and resilience act as complementary concepts. The base of one's attachment style with one's parents in childhood, determines whether one will be capable enough to recover quickly from the problems faced in adulthood. The current study is an attempt towards exploring the relationship between attachment styles, particularly, secure attachment style and insecure-ambivalent type attachment style, and resilience. This study also gives an account of the development and psychometric properties of the Attachment Style Scale - Secure and the Ambivalent type. **Methods:** Survey method was employed using convenient sampling and 127 participants in the age group of 18-29 years were given the Attachment Style Scale - Secure and the Ambivalent type and Resilience scale. Pearson's correlation and Multiple regression was computed for analysis. **Results:** The results were found to be in-line with the theoretical concepts of attachment styles and resilience. Resilience had a positive relationship with secure attachment style and a negative relationship with insecure-ambivalent type attachment style. Both the attachment styles were found to be significant predictors of resilience, with insecure - ambivalent type having a better predictive power. **Conclusion:** Both the attachment styles were significant predictors of resilience, where, secure attachment style shared a positive relationship with resilience, and insecure-ambivalent type attachment style shared a negative relationship with resilience.

Keywords: Attachment styles, secure & insecure-ambivalent type, resilience, better predictor, adult population

Humans are wired in a way that lets them emotionally connect and develop attachment with others. The need to belong and to have an emotional attachment are the two cardinal human needs important in forming and maintaining enduring, supportive, and meaningful interpersonal relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Early experiences determine a person's style of attachment, and its quality shapes the managing of future adult relationships.

¹M.A. Clinical Psychology, Student, Department of Psychology, VES College of Arts, Science and Commerce, Chembur, Mumbai, India

²PhD (Psychology), Associate Professor and Head, Department of Psychology, VES College of Arts, Science and Commerce, Chembur, Mumbai, India

*Corresponding Author

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People come across various difficulties during their lifespan and resilience determines their ability to bounce back from these difficulties. Although attachment styles and resilience are separate constructs, early attachment pattern has an impact on the ability to seek external support and cope with the difficulties.

Attachment

Attachment is an enduring emotional bond that develops between two individuals. John Bowlby, the pioneer of the concept of attachment, described attachment as a “lasting psychological connectedness between human beings” (Bowlby, 1969). Much of the early conceptualization about attachment emphasize the ability of the child to establish a secure and firm relationship with at least one of the primary caregivers i.e. one of the parents (Bowlby, 1969) and developing a secure base in early social relationships (Blatz, 1996; Bartholomew, 1990; Shaver et al., 1996).

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory is a psychological model that explains the patterns of changing long-term and short-term interpersonal relationships between human beings. The main principle of attachment theory is that the early infant-parent relationship influences one’s success in social and emotional development. This acts as the internal working model for developing future relations.

Further, the attachment theory states that these internal models of early attachment experiences have long term effects and remains relatively stable across the lifespan. (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980). Internal working models form a cornerstone for the establishment and assimilation of affective experiences, helping them modulate their feelings in relationships; helping to form coherent new experiences, and shaping subjective reality (Bretherton, 1985, 1990; Crittenden, 1990; Main et al., 1985; Howe, 1995).

Attachment Styles

Attachment styles can be understood as a type of cognitive, emotional and behavioral framework, which is a part of the innate behavioral system and is based on early attachment experiences with parents. Activation of this innate behavioral system influences the way an individual engages in future relationships.

Mary Ainsworth (1970) was the first researcher to identify different attachment styles. Ainsworth, 1979 stated that:

The attachment figure has a crucial role in managing anxiety during the infant’s period of complete dependency. By developing sensitive responsiveness, or the ability to tune into the infant and respond appropriately, he/she helps the infant to form a secure attachment. When this is established, it provides the child with a base from which to explore the world. (p.11)

Ainsworth’s original three categories of attachment styles, namely, anxious-avoidant, anxious-resistant and secure attachment styles, and the one developed later on, that is, disorganized attachment style, typifies internal working models. The secure pattern creates an atmosphere for optimal development, facilitating self-worth, perceiving others as reliable and available, and the environment is experienced as demanding but amenable with support and assistance. Insecure categories illustrate the infant’s ability to attune to a less than optimal environment (Bowlby, 1980). Bowlby employs the concept of defensive exclusion

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to describe the strategies adopted by the infant in these situations (Vandevivere et al., 2014). For example, the ambivalent/resistant pattern develops in response to inconsistent, unreliable and, at times unwelcoming, responses from the attachment figure. This implies uncertainty about one's self-worth, where, others are seen as unreliable, oppressive and insensitive, and the environment is experienced as unpredictable and chaotic. Individuals having this type of attachment styles, are characterized by helplessness and resentment. "By adolescence, individuals with a history of ambivalent attachment more often engage in intense and explosive relationships with attachment figures. They may desperately want relationships with peers and significant others but fear rejection and may drive others away" (Allen & Land, 1999).

There is evidence of continuity in patterns of attachment over time. By adulthood, the attachment patterns which are laid down in childhood, become more generalized to other close relationships and resistant to change due to the tendency of the working model to integrate new experiences (Bowlby, 1973). Hesse states that adults with ambivalent patterns remain preoccupied with relationships often enmeshed in on-going conflict and cannot access support when necessary whereas adults with a secure attachment style are autonomous, able to maintain boundaries and access support when necessary (Hesse, 1999). Hence, attachment styles play an important role in guiding further relationships in every individual's life.

Resilience

One factor that is associated with attachment patterns is, resilience to face life's difficulties. "Resilience is knowing that you are the only one that has the power and the responsibility to pick yourself up" (Holloway Mary, n.d.).

Resilience refers to the ability to bounce back from tough times. Emmy Werner ("Psychological resilience," 2020), one of the early scientists to use the term resilience in the 1970s, found that despite growing up with alcoholic or mentally ill parents, one third of the cohort of children did not develop destructive behaviors (Werner & Smith, 1982), indicative of 'resilience' - the ability to bounce back and deal effectively with traumatic situation.

Resilience can also be understood as "an individual's achievement or maintenance of positive outcomes despite adverse experiences that would normally lead to a negative outcome" (Rutter, 2007). In fact, resilience is not only about coping with an extremely stressful situation, but also emerging with greater social and emotional competence.

Being resilient is important because it leads to reduction in depressive symptoms, increases one's resistance to stress and boosts immune system functioning. It also helps an individual cope better with stress, through enhanced problem-solving, a positive orientation, and re-evaluation of stressors.

Factors Facilitating the Development of Resilience

There are different factors that contribute to the development of resilience in individuals. Research shows that there are mainly three factors associated with resilience, namely, a) individual characteristics such as temperament, competence, self-efficacy and self-esteem; b) family support; and c) supportive people other than the family (Brown & Rhodes, 1991; Compas, 1987; Garmezy, 1994; Matson, 2001; Werner & Smith, 1982). People having easy going temperament and a sense of positive self-worth, as well as social support (family and

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others) tend to have more positive emotional experiences which fosters adaptive coping, builds enduring social resources, increases personal well-being and enables better management of negative emotions.

Attachment styles and Resilience

Attachment styles and resilience are separate constructs, but they are interlinked in various ways. Matson and Coatsworth (1998, p.208 as cited in Atwool, 2006) state that infant's competence to develop attachment is one of the important tasks of childhood, which is embedded in the caregiving system, leading to the formation of internal working model for relationships. A secure internal working model incorporates all of the aspects or components that foster resilience. The ambivalent patterns of attachment have an adaptive value and they illustrate a degree of resilience, enabling the children to efficiently manage relationships and emotions (Ainsworth, 1991).

Hence, attachment theory emphasizes on the significance of relationships, providing a theoretical frame of reference, which encourages an integrated approach to understanding the behavior of children and the dynamics of resilience.

Rationale and Objective of the Study

Reviewing of literature on attachment suggests fewer research being conducted with adult population (Allen & Land, 1999; Charney, 2004). Also, a large body of research on resilience has come from studies in children and adolescents exposed to a wide range of adverse conditions (Luthar et al., 2000; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). There has also been relatively little research on the stability of attachment security or on associations among attachment styles with different attachment figures over the period of life (Doyle, Lawford & Markiewicz, 2009). A review of existing literature suggests a relationship between secure attachment style and resilience. However, very few researches have compared secure and ambivalent type attachment styles and their impact on resilience.

The main objective of this study is therefore, to understand the predictive ability of secure and insecure-ambivalent type attachment styles on resilience. On that account, it is hypothesized that resilience will have a positive relationship with secure attachment style and on the contrary, a negative relationship with insecure-ambivalent type attachment style. Also, the current study hypothesizes that secure attachment style will predict higher resilience as compared to insecure-ambivalent type attachment style.

METHODOLOGY

I) Sampling and Sample Characteristics

Convenient sampling technique was employed to collect the data from 127 young adults between the age group of 18-29 years. Specifically, this age group was chosen because adulthood is a phase of dealing with various kinds of stressors and adverse conditions. Also, at this point in time, an individual's earlier attachment patterns are reflected well in their relationship with the important people in their life.

II) Tools Used

Attachment Style Scale - Secure and the Ambivalent type is a 12-item scale which measures two kinds of attachment styles among the adults, namely, secure attachment style and insecure-ambivalent type attachment style. A total of six items are assessed for each type of attachment styles and two items measuring each of the core features are tapped in the

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scale. Keeping in mind their close relationships, the subjects were asked to rate each item using a five-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) - 5 (strongly agree).

1.a. Development of the Scale

A number of attachment style measures exist but most of them compares only secure and insecure attachment style. However, the researchers did not find any measure that specifically compared secure and ambivalent type attachment styles. Also, most of the measures assessed attachment styles in the context of infancy or romantic relationships, but very few are measuring in terms of close adult relationships (family, peers and romantic relationships). Hence, it was found necessary to develop a new scale for assessing secure and insecure-ambivalent type attachment style in close adult relationships. Few of the items in this measure were derived from Griffin and Bartholomew's Relationship Scale Questionnaire (1994), Hazan and Shaver's Attachment Style Questionnaire (the original attachment three category measure, 1987) and Adult Attachment Scale (Collins and Read, 1996). Rest of the items were newly constructed for fulfilling the purpose of the current study.

Operationally, secure attachment style can be defined as relationship with close others, which is trustful/dependable, stable and comfortable seeking support, whereas insecure-ambivalent type attachment style can be defined as relationship with close others, which is distrustful/suspicious, resistant, and clingy as measured in terms of scores obtained on the Attachment Style Scale - Secure and the Ambivalent type. The process of item construction consisted of forming an item pool, analyzing and establishing content validity and reliability.

1.b. Item Pool

The item pool addressed specific attachment patterns on the basis of the core features tapped by each attachment style.

Core Features – Secure Attachment Style

Feature	Definition
Trust/Dependability	A complete belief in someone or considering someone as reliable
Stability	A firmly established relationship
Seeking Social Support	Asking help from others

Core Features – Insecure (Ambivalent Type) Attachment Style

Feature	Definition
Distrust/suspicion	A lack of faith in someone
Resistance	Being reluctant and/or trying to seek closeness but at the same time resisting it
Being clingy	Being too emotionally dependent on someone

An item pool of 14 statements (7 - secure attachment; 7 - ambivalent type) was generated from the available standardized scales and by consulting experts in the field of psychology. Each of the items were segregated on the basis of the core features it measured. In order to have an equal number of items tapping each core feature, two items were eliminated, thus

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having two items measuring each of the core features. Hence, a final scale with 12 items was subjected to content validity and reliability.

1.c. Content Validity

“One of the strengths of content validation is the simple and intuitive nature of its basic idea, which holds that what a test seeks to measure constitutes a content domain and the items on the test should sample from that domain in a way that makes the test items representative of the entire domain” as reported in Content Validity, Encyclopedia of Research Design (2012). Content validity was established by giving the test items to a panel of nine experts from the field of psychology asking them to rate the items in terms of their relevance.

Once the experts gave their ratings, a content validity index, that is, a measure of quantitative evaluation, was calculated in order to know the validity index of the scale. There are two types of content validity index - Content Validity Index for Items (I-CVI), which is an item-level content validity and Content Validity Index for Scale (S-CVI), which is an overall scale-level content validity, divided into two - S-CVI/UA (universal agreement) & S-CVI/Ave (average). The CVI ranges between zero to one. In the current study, the S-CVI/Ave was computed. Table 1 lists the computed I-CVIs for each item in the scale used for assessing attachment styles in the current study.

Table 1 Content Validity Index for Individual Items

<u>ITEMS</u>	<u>I-CVI</u>
1	1.00
2	0.88
3	1.00
4	1.00
5	1.00
6	1.00
7	1.00
8	0.71
9	0.85
10	0.71
11	0.85
12	1.00

Thus, the S-CVI for the Attachment Style Scale - Secure and the Ambivalent type would be, sum of I-CVIs divided by the total number of items, that is, 11 divided by 12, which would equal to 0.91. An acceptable standard for the S-CVI/Ave is 0.90 (Waltz et al., 2005; Chiwaridzo et al., 2017). Hence, the content validity index of the present scale was found to be within the acceptable range.

1.d. Internal consistency

The scale was given to 35 participants in order to establish the reliability of the scale. Cronbach's alpha was computed to assess the reliability of the test. Table 2 shows the alpha coefficients of both the attachment styles, which were found to 0.40 each. Based on the results of the pilot study, 2 old items were deleted, 2 new items were added and a few items were modified. Thereafter, another set of 30 participants were given the scale for the purpose of establishing new reliability coefficients. The alpha coefficients for Secure attachment style and Insecure-Ambivalent type attachment style were 0.76 and 0.53

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respectively. These findings suggested moderate to high internal consistency of the Attachment Style Scale - Secure and the Ambivalent type.

Table 2 Reliability Coefficients for Attachment Styles

	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha (after the items were modified)
Secure Attachment Style	0.40	0.76
Insecure-Ambivalent type Attachment Style	0.40	0.53

2. The 14-Item Resilience Scale (RS-14) developed by Wagnild (2009a) is a scale which measures resilience among the adults. The subjects rated the items using a seven-point Likert type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) – 7 (strongly agree). The total range of the scale was between 14 – 98. The reported alpha-coefficients of the scale was 0.91.

Procedure

Once the final scale was finalized after pilot and validation, google forms were created and administered on adult population using convenient sampling. Responses of the participants were recorded and the statistical analysis of the data was computed.

RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

A total of 132 participants were a part of this study. Data of 5 participants had to be discarded as they did not fit in with the criteria, that is, they did not fit the inclusion criteria. Thus, a sample of 127 adult individuals was used for final data analysis, out of which, 75 were females and 52 were males. Data analysis was carried out using the methods of correlation (Pearson's product moment) and regression analysis (linear multiple regression). Resilience was fairly normally distributed in the sample (mean = 76.23, SD = 11.23, skewness = -0.44, kurtosis = -0.10, range = 48-98). (Refer Table 3)

It was found out that in a sample of 127 adult participants, 7 participants fall between the range of 14 – 56, indicating very low resilience, 14 participants between the range of 57 – 64, indicating low resilience, 24 participants between the range of 65 – 73, indicating that they are on the low end of resilience, 42 participants between the range of 74 – 81, indicating moderate resilience, 29 participants between the range of 82 – 90, indicating they have moderately high resilience, whereas only 11 participants fall between the range of 91 – 98, indicating high resilience.

Resilience was found to be positively correlated with secure attachment style ($r = 0.21$, $p = 0.009$). (Refer Table 4)

There was a negative correlation observed between resilience and insecure- ambivalent type attachment style ($r = -0.24$, $p = 0.003$). (Refer Table 4)

Table 3 Mean Score, Standard Deviation, Skewness, Kurtosis and Range for Resilience

N	Standard		Skewness	Kurtosis	Range
	Mean	Deviation (SD)			
127	76.23	11.23	-0.44	-0.10	48-98

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Table 4 Correlational Analysis Between Attachment Styles and Resilience

	r	Sig.
Secure Attachment Style	0.21	0.009*
Insecure-Ambivalent type Attachment Style	-0.24	0.003*

Note: * $p < 0.05$

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess the relationship between attachment styles and resilience. The variable of resilience was regressed onto the predictor variables of secure attachment style and insecure-ambivalent type attachment style. Both secure attachment style (Beta = 0.17, $t = 2.01$, $p = 0.047$) and insecure-ambivalent type attachment style (Beta = -0.21, $t = -2.47$, $p = 0.015$) were found to be significantly associated with resilience. (Refer Table 5)

Table 5 Standardized and Unstandardized coefficients for Attachment Styles and Resilience

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std.Error*	Beta		
Model 1					
Secure Attachment Style	0.49	0.24	0.17	2.01	0.047**
Insecure- Ambivalent type Attachment Style	-0.52	0.21	-0.21	-2.47	0.015**

0.015**

Note: Model 1: Predictive variables: Secure attachment style and Insecure-Ambivalent type attachment style. *Standard error of slope. ** $p < 0.05$

The regression equation was found ($F(2,124) = 6.07$, $p < 0.003$), with an R^2 of 0.09. Participants' predicted resilience is equal to $73.96 - 0.52$ (insecure-ambivalent type attachment style) + 0.49 (secure attachment style). (Refer Tables 5, 6 & 7)

Table 6 Regression Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
0.30	0.09	0.07	10.80

Table 7 Anova Summary for Regression Model

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1418.20	2	709.10	6.07	0.003*
Residual	14476.18	124	116.74		
Total	15894.38	126			

Note: * $p < 0.05$

As per the equation, for every one standard deviation of change seen in variable 1 (i.e., secure attachment style), the resilience of the person increases by 0.49 standard deviations. In other words, the more the person is secure in his/her relationships, the more the person is resilient. (Refer Table 5)

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Similarly, for every one standard deviation of change seen in variable 2 (i.e., insecure-ambivalent type attachment style), the resilience of the person decreases by negative 0.52 standard deviations. In other words, the more the person is ambivalent in his/her relationships, the less the person is resilient. (Refer Table 5)

Interestingly, it was observed that insecure-ambivalent type attachment style had a better predictive power as compared to secure attachment style, i.e., people having insecure-ambivalent type attachment style were more likely to demonstrate low resilience.

DISCUSSION

The objective of the study was to understand the relationship between attachment styles and resilience. Data analysis was carried out using the methods of correlation and regression analysis.

Berman and Sperling (1994) explained that adult attachment refers to an individual's consistent tendency to effectively seek and maintain proximity and connect with at least one specific individual who is able to provide the potential for physical and/or psychological safety and emotional security. Individuals who exhibit secure attachment style tend to be involved in relationships that are described as trustworthy, stable and in those where one is comfortable seeking support, whereas, individuals who exhibit insecure-ambivalent type attachment style tend to be involved in relationships that are marked by distrust, resistance and clingy behaviors. Resilience refers to "the individual's ability to rebound when confronted with a psychological challenge" (Strumpfer, 2001). Results of the present study revealed the existence of a systematic difference on resilience as a function of secure and insecure-ambivalent type attachment style in the adult population. It was observed that resilience had a positive relationship with secure attachment style, whereas, it tended to have a negative relationship with insecure-ambivalent type attachment style. These results were in accordance with the previous findings (Shibue & Kasai, 2014; Karreman & Vingerhoets, 2012; Simeon et al., 2007).

The study found out that the secure attachment style was a good predictor of resilience as compared to insecure-ambivalent type attachment style. However, it was noted that insecure-ambivalent type attachment style had a better predictive power. It was also found out that only 20% of the participants seemed to score higher on insecure-ambivalent type attachment style, which is supported by previous research findings (Lyddon, Bradford & Nelson, 1993; Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1990).

Attachment is important in the development of resilience (Huertas, 2005; Fraley & Shaver, 1999; Machin, 2009). Several factors affect resilience, reflecting secure and insecure-ambivalent type attachment styles. Social support and perceived social support are vital for individuals in order to build resilience required to deal with life challenges (Weinman et al., 2003). Factors such as stable relationships, family and partner support, trust were presumed to be the key elements in the development of resilience (Atwool, 2006). Other research findings stated that stable attachment relationships are plausibly significant in building resilience, which might lower the intensity of the negative emotions experienced due to the acute or chronic stressors in one's life (Rasmussen et al., 2019). Early childhood unpredictability and inconsistent caregiving experienced by people who have ambivalent attachment style leads to developing an internal working model of the world being uncertain and untrustworthy, having mixed feelings about receiving support from others, and poor

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ability to explore alternative solutions while facing challenges, thus, affecting their ability to develop resilience (Cassidy & Berlin, 1994; Bretherton, 2013).

Thus, the study supports the previous findings on the relationship between attachment styles and resilience.

Both attachment styles and resilience play a very significant role in an individual's development throughout life. The findings from this study recognizes the important fact that the relationship patterns developed early in life influence later relationships and the more secure they are, the more a person is able to deal with adverse conditions. A major implication of the study would be in the field of developing empirically based effective parenting programme wherein,

- i. Parents learn the need for establishing consistency and certainty of their presence in the child's life.
- ii. Help their child to develop a secure base from which they can explore alternative solutions to difficult situations.
- iii. Help their child develop feelings of social competence and self-confidence.
- iv. Healthy dependence on others for eliciting support later in life.

The current study did not explore the relationship between any specific relationship domain (parents, friends, romantic partners) and resilience. This is a limitation as at different ages, different relationship domains take precedence in one's life. Secondly, the study was conducted on adult population and the results may not be generalized to other age groups.

Consequently, it is suggested that future studies employ the measures in different samples, to understand whether the findings vary across different age groups. Also, various other variables which may play a potential role in mediating attachment styles and resilience, should be explored, in order to better understand the cognitive, emotional and personality factors that may foster the development and amelioration of resilience. For further studies, one can also examine the relationship between attachment styles and resilience in clinical samples, such as individuals with personality disorders. It is also suggested that researchers can understand the effect of birth order on attachment styles and resilience. Also, attachment styles developed in early childhood and their effects on Erikson's psychosocial stages and resilience can be studied. For making further research more intriguing, resilience can be studied along with cycle of violence and history of childhood abuse and neglect, whereas attachment styles can be studied with inferiority complex and defense mechanisms.

CONCLUSION

The current study examined the relationship between secure and ambivalent attachment styles and their impact on resilience in Indian adult population. The study revealed that both the types of attachment styles were significant predictors of resilience.

Data Availability Statement

Most of the data generated or analysed during this study are included in this published article. Any additional datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study will be available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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Statements And Declaration

The authors declare that they have NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as educational grants; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript. Also, informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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