

## Effect of Rejection Sensitivity and Adult Attachment on Relationship Satisfaction

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### ABSTRACT

Relationships are some of the most significant and complex social ties. They are an integral part of human experience. The aim was to study the effect of rejection sensitivity and adult attachment on relationship satisfaction. For this data was collected from 80 individuals belonging to the age group 18-28 years who have been dating their current partner for at least two years or more. Rejection Sensitivity was measured using Adult Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire, Adult Attachment was measured using Adult Attachment Scale and Relationship Satisfaction was measured using Relationship Assessment Scale. The data was analyzed using correlation and regression. It was found that rejection sensitivity and relationship satisfaction have a positive correlation. Close and dependent attachment also had a positive correlation with relationship satisfaction. Anxious attachment had a negative correlation with relationship satisfaction.

**Keywords:** *Rejection Sensitivity, Attachment Dependent Attachment, Anxious Attachment, Young Adults, Relationship Satisfaction*

Romantic relationships are a fundamental aspect of human experience. Marriage and other romantic partnerships have the potential to provide demands for commitment, sexual fulfilment, and lifelong friendship. But a large percentage of couples see these favourable traits deteriorate over time, and for others, relationship satisfaction even reaches the point of breaking up. According to popular opinion, relationship satisfaction is the last typical step before a relationship ends. Numerous theories have been proposed regarding the distinctive characteristics that result in relationship satisfaction. However, it is possible that the degree to which partners' expectations for the relationship are met by their actual experiences also plays a role in determining satisfaction. An interpersonal assessment of one's partner's positive feelings and attraction to the relationship is what is meant by relationship satisfaction (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Relationships will be satisfying for those individuals whose expectations are met, whereas people whose relationships are incongruent with their expectations will feel unsatisfied. Relationship satisfaction is a subjective emotion and viewpoint, not a characteristic of a relationship. Because of this, opinions on how satisfied a couple is with their union may vary among its members. The relationship between

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couple closeness and overall relationship satisfaction is well established in recent literature; when couples experience feelings of intimacy, they tend to report high levels of relationship satisfaction (Greeff & Malherbe, 2001).

Rejection sensitivity is a cognitive-affective processing tendency to fear rejection. It is influenced by cognitive-social learning history and is activated in circumstances where rejection or acceptance may occur. Different people react differently to social rejection. High rejection sensitivity people are so afraid of and adverse to rejection that it affects their daily life. These individuals consistently anticipate rejection. Additionally, they frequently act in ways that alienate other people as they frantically search for indications that someone does not want to be with them. Adults who are sensitive to rejection and are in romantic relationships are likely to have continuous relationship issues. Because they are constantly on the lookout for rejection, they frequently misread situations and emotions. Due to the person's fear of abandonment or rejection, these actions may cause irrational jealousy. They might also view certain actions, like a partner being preoccupied with work, as evidence that they are no longer in love with each other. Being in a committed relationship may benefit males with rejection sensitivity more than it does women. According to one study, males who are not in a romantic relationship feel more alone and are more sensitive to rejection. However, women who score highly in rejection sensitivity are unlikely to find satisfaction in a relationship. Even when they are in a relationship, they could still experience the same levels of loneliness and fear of rejection as when they are alone (Nowland et al, 2018). Rejection sensitivity may cause people to remove themselves emotionally and physically from their love partners, decreasing opportunities for both rejecting and accepting events and decreasing relationship satisfaction (Norona & Colleagues, 2016). People who are really afraid of rejection engage with their romantic partners in ways like needing reassurance all the time, which actually makes the partner dissatisfied and creates a self-fulfilling prophecy (Marston, Hare & Allen, 2010).

The attachment behavioural system's main goal is to improve the chances that vulnerable people will make it through the dangers of childhood. Natural selection designed the attachment system to become active when a person feels fear, worry, or other forms of discomfort. The system's proximity to vulnerable new-borns, children, or adults is intended to improve survival from an evolutionary perspective by keeping parents (or other caretakers) nearby. From a psychological perspective, closeness lessens worry, fear, and other forms of distress, allowing people to focus on other activities. When a person's worry, anxiety, or discomfort sufficiently subsides, the attachment system is terminated. But the system stays partially or fully activated if adequate security is not established. According to Hazan and Shaver (1987), romantic relationships between adults are attachments, just like relationships between infants and their caregivers, and romantic love is a characteristic of the attachment behavioural system as well as the motivational processes that lead to caring and sexuality. The three types of adult attachment are close, depend, and anxiety (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Close attachment means the extent to which a person is comfortable with closeness and intimacy. Dependent attachment means the extent to which a person feels he/she can depend on others to be available when needed. Anxious attachment means the extent to which a person is worried about being abandoned or unloved. When either partner experienced high worry over abandonment or low comfort with proximity, the relationship was very unsatisfactory (Jones & Cunningham, 1996). Relationship satisfaction tends to influence the attachment styles. The findings suggest that partners who are less Avoidant, less Anxious/ambivalent, and more Secure reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction and wrote more positive relationship descriptions (Hammond & Fletcher, 1991). Lopez

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(2016) found that Significant correlations existed between attachment styles and relationship satisfaction as well as attachment styles and rejection sensitivity. The associations between anxious attachment and rejection sensitivity were greater than those between avoidant attachment. Avoidance and anxiety, the two adult attachment variables, both predict conflict-resolution tactics and relationship satisfaction. Although there are gender differences in conflict resolution activities, attachment traits are a better predictor of conflict resolution and relationship satisfaction (Shi, 2010). More relationship-specific irrational beliefs were held by insecure people (anxious-ambivalent or avoidant) than by people with a stable adult attachment pattern. The endorsement of irrational ideas by gender also appeared to follow gendered patterns. Additionally, lower relationship satisfaction was associated with both an insecure adult attachment style and increased commitment to relationship-specific illogical beliefs (Stackert & Bursik, 2003).

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### *Objectives*

To study the effect of rejection sensitivity and adult attachment on relationship satisfaction of young adults.

#### *Hypothesis*

- H1: There is a negative relationship between rejection sensitivity and relationship satisfaction.
- H2: There is a positive relationship between close attachment style and relationship satisfaction.
- H3: There is a positive relationship between dependent attachment style and relationship satisfaction.
- H4: There is a negative relationship between anxious attachment style and relationship satisfaction.

#### *Sample*

The sample comprised of 80 young adults belonging to the age group 18-28 years, who had been dating their current partner for at least 2 years.

#### *Design*

A correlational design was used. Rejection Sensitivity and Adult Attachment were independent variable whereas Relationship Satisfaction was dependent variable.

#### *Instruments*

Three measures were used in this study:

1. **Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire, Adult version (A-RSQ):** It was developed by Berenson & Colleagues (2011). The Rejection Sensitivity-Adult questionnaire (A-RSQ) has been adapted from RSQ (Downey & Feldman, 1996) for assessing RS in adults. The scale has 9 items which describe situations in which people sometimes ask things of others. For each item, the respondent must imagine that they are in the situation, and then answer the questions that follow it. This scale measures how sensitive is an individual to rejection. The Cronbach alpha of this scale is .87 and discriminant validity has been established.
2. **Adult Attachment Scale:** It was developed by Collins & Read (1990). It consists of 18 items which evaluate three different attachment styles. The scale contains three subscales, each composed of six items. The three subscales are close, depend, and

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anxiety. The Close scale measures the extent to which a person is comfortable with closeness and intimacy. The Depend scale measures the extent to which a person feels he/she can depend on others to be available when needed. The Anxiety subscale measures the extent to which a person is worried about being abandoned or unloved. Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .69 for Close, .75 for Dependent, and .72 for Anxiety. Test-retest correlations for a 2-month period were .68 for Close, .71 for Dependent, and .52 for Anxiety. Discriminatory and construct-related validity were established.

- 3. Relationship Assessment Scale:** It was developed by Hendrick S.S. (1998). It is a 7-item scale designed to measure general relationship satisfaction. Respondents answer each item using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (low satisfaction) to 5 (high satisfaction). Cronbach Alpha was .91 and Split-half reliability was .93. Predictive validity and criterion related validity were also established.

### Procedure

The participants were requested to fill the research form through google forms. A google form was made for data collection purposes. Informed consent was obtained from the participant. After receiving the informed consent, the subject was given the instructions about the questionnaires. The instructions were given that you have to fill some questionnaires. Do not spend too much time on each question as there is no right or wrong answer. Your responses will be kept confidential and please respond honestly. Then the questionnaire was given to the subject. And the score which was obtained by the participant was noted down.

## RESULTS

**Table No. 1 Correlations between Rejection Sensitivity, Adult Attachment and Relationship Satisfaction**

		Rejection Sensitivity	Close Attachment	Dependent Attachment	Anxious Attachment	Relationship Satisfaction
Rejection Sensitivity	Pearson Correlation	1	.400**	.421**	-.459**	.359**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.001
	N	80	80	80	80	80
Close Attachment	Pearson Correlation	.400**	1	.338**	-.327**	.419**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.002	.003	.000
	N	80	80	80	80	80
Dependent Attachment	Pearson Correlation	.421**	.338**	1	-.459**	.366**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.002		.000	.001
	N	80	80	80	80	80
Anxious Attachment	Pearson Correlation	-.459**	-.327**	-.459**	1	-.448**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.003	.000		.000
	N	80	80	80	80	80
Relationship Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.359**	.419**	.366**	-.448**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000	.001	.000	
	N	80	80	80	80	80

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

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From Table 1 we can infer that rejection sensitivity and relationship satisfaction are positively correlated ( $r=.359$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) which is statistically significant. Close attachment and relationship satisfaction are positively correlated ( $r=.419$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) which is statistically significant. Dependent attachment and relationship satisfaction are positively correlated ( $r=.366$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) which is statistically significant. Anxious Attachment and relationship satisfaction is negatively correlated ( $r=-.448$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) which is statistically significant.

**Table No. 2 Regression analysis of Rejection Sensitivity, Adult Attachment and Relationship Satisfaction**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.	Adjusted R
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t		
1	(Constant)	23.876	1.218		19.602	.000	.118
	Rejection	.252	.074	.359	3.400	.001	
2	(Constant)	31.144	2.558		12.177	.000	.210
	Rejection	.137	.079	.195	1.733	.087	
	Anxiety	-.324	.102	-.358	-3.183	.002	
3	(Constant)	25.051	3.427		7.311	.000	.264
	Rejection	.076	.080	.108	.949	.346	
	Anxiety	-.279	.100	-.308	-2.792	.007	
	Close	.325	.127	.275	2.565	.012	

*a. Dependent Variable: Relationship Satisfaction*

Stepwise Regression was used for regression analysis of rejection sensitivity, adult attachment, and relationship satisfaction. From table 2 we can infer that Rejection has an Adjusted R value of .118 which means that 11.8% variance in relationship satisfaction could be attributed to rejection sensitivity. Similarly, Rejection Sensitivity and Anxious Attachment style have an Adjusted R value of .210 which means that 21% variance in relationship satisfaction can be attributed to rejection sensitivity and anxious attachment style together. Rejection Sensitivity, Anxious attachment and Close attachment have an Adjusted R value of .264 which means that they cause 26.4% variance in relationship satisfaction. From the above table we can also infer that Rejection Sensitivity has a B value of .076 which means that one unit increase in Rejection Sensitivity causes .076 increase in Relationship Satisfaction. Anxiety has a B value of -.279 which means that one unit increase in Anxious Attachment causes .279 decrease in Relationship Satisfaction. Close has a B value of .325 which means that one unit increase in Close Attachment causes .325 increase in relationship satisfaction.

## DISCUSSION

The aim of current study was to explore the effect of rejection sensitivity and adult attachment on relationship satisfaction. Relationships are an important part of human experience. Many factors may affect relationship satisfaction, two of the possible factors, that is, rejection sensitivity and relationship satisfaction were studied in this research and it was found that they both predict relationship satisfaction to some extent.

Based on the past studies and researchers, few aspects were hypothesized. The first aspect that was hypothesized was that there is a negative correlation between rejection sensitivity and relationship satisfaction. This hypothesis was rejected as we found a positive correlation between rejection sensitivity and relationship satisfaction. In previous literature opposite

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results have been found. Norona & colleagues (2016) found that rejection sensitivity may cause people to remove themselves emotionally and physically from their love partners, decreasing opportunities for both rejecting and accepting events and decreasing relationship satisfaction.

The second aspect that was hypothesized was that there is a positive correlation between close attachment and relationship satisfaction. This hypothesis was accepted as we found a positive correlation between close attachment and relationship satisfaction. Previous literature exists in support of this result where it was found that when either partner experienced high worry over abandonment or low comfort with proximity, the relationship was very unsatisfactory (Jones & Cunningham, 1996).

The third aspect that was hypothesized was that there is a positive correlation between dependent attachment and relationship satisfaction. This hypothesis was accepted as we found a positive correlation between dependent attachment and relationship satisfaction. In a study by Collins and Read (1990) it was found that lower relationship satisfaction is characteristic of people who have either avoidant or anxious attachment styles; people who score low on both dimensions are more successful in their relationships.

The fourth aspect that was hypothesized was that there is a negative correlation between anxious attachment and relationship satisfaction. This hypothesis was accepted as we found a negative correlation between anxious attachment and relationship satisfaction. In previous research similar results have been found where relationship satisfaction was negatively correlated with attachment anxiety, that means better relationship satisfaction was the outcome of lower self-reported mean scores of attachment anxiety (Ayenew, 2016).

### CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to explore the effect of rejection sensitivity and adult attachment on relationship satisfaction. It was found that both rejection sensitivity and adult attachment style predict relationship satisfaction to some extent. A positive correlation was found between rejection sensitivity and relationship satisfaction. Also, a positive correlation was found between close and dependent adult attachment style with relationship satisfaction whereas a negative correlation was found between anxious adult attachment style and relationship satisfaction. A few possible limitations of this study could be that the sample is based only on young adults from Urban Areas. Also, difference in the age when they started dating, that is, someone who is 18 years old and in a relationship since past 2 years must have started dating when they were 16 years old and similarly someone who is 28 years old now must have started dating when they were 26 years old, they might have had different motivations to get into and maintain their relationships which might have a role to play in the way results came out. A future implication of this research could be to study the effect of rejection sensitivity and adult attachment on relationship satisfaction across various age groups and gender.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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