

## Attachment Styles, Perceived Social Support and Homesickness among Outstation Students

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### ABSTRACT

The study aimed at finding the role of attachment styles, perceived social support, and homesickness and among outstation students along with gender differences. A sample of 297 outstation students participated in the study. The Revised Adult attachment scale, Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support and the Utrecht Homesickness scale are used to assess the variables. Statistical packages for social sciences (SPSS) were used to analyse the data. The findings indicated that there is a significant negative correlation and positive between the dimensions of perceived social support and homesickness. It was also found that female out station students experienced higher levels of homesickness in comparison to male outstation students. The present research findings can enhance helping out-station or international student's psychological well-being. Educational schools can offer tools and assistance to aid students in creating more secure attachment patterns, such as peer support groups. Interventions can also be created to assist students in learning how to cope with grief, especially for those who might be more susceptible because of their attachment style.

**Keywords:** Attachment styles, Perceived social support, homesickness, out-station students.

**B**engaluru is known as the Silicon Valley of India (Kar, S. M. 2016) and there is a growing population of students moving to the city for academic purposes. Reasons include reputed institutions, quality of education, job opportunities, companies and start-up organizations, and amalgamation of cultures. (IGauge, 2020)

This study aims to understand the role of one's attachment styles in determining the levels of homesickness faced by an outstation student. Homesickness can be caused by various reasons such as missing home, family members, homecooked food, friends, relatives, not being able to cope with stressors, inability to manage finances, difficulties in socializing, group conformity, loneliness and isolation. (Stroebe et al., 2015). Vilet (2001) discussed that external factors such as support from people or adjustment difficulties can also have an impact on one's ability to cope with external stressors.

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Homesickness is a complicated emotional-cognitive process that includes longing for home, melancholy emotions, and physical symptoms. (Fisher, 1989) It can be influenced by factors such as upbringing, coping ability, relationship with parents and siblings, culture, proximity between home and previous educational institute, and environmental and psychosocial factors. To counter homesickness, students move towards seeking social support in their new environments, develop romantic relationships, peers, or other care taking institutions.

Physical symptoms include gastric and intestinal problems, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, headache, fatigue, and minor aches in the body. Cognitive symptoms include thoughts about missing one's home, obsessive thoughts, negative thoughts about the current new environment, and forgetfulness. (Van Tilburg et al. 1996)

According to Cohen (2004), social support systems are those in which an individual receives emotional, social, and cognitive support from others around him. Social support is described as "any process through which social relationships might promote health and well-being" by Cohen & colleagues (2000). According to Eker et al. (2001), perceived social support refers to a person's perception of whether or not their social network is sufficiently supportive. The individual's feeling of self-evaluation is the perceived social support (Sorias, 1988 b). According to Kim et al. (2008), perceived social support measures people's trust in the availability of sufficient support when needed. Social assistance has many different dimensions, which has been frequently employed. A meta-analysis indicates that not having a network of meaningful relationships in life is more predictive of mortality than other lifestyle behaviours, such as smoking or physical activity (Holt 2017). This study aims to learn more about the student's attachment style and how they seek social support when they feel homesick.

John Bowlby (1969) the attachment style pioneer, outlines how the unique connections between infants and their caregiver lay the groundwork for future relationship development. Importantly, attachment is thought to have a significant influence in social beliefs. Bartholomew (1990) proposed a four-category attachment model that systematizes Bowlby's internal working models. The secure attachment style is characterized by a positive view of both self and others, while the preoccupied attachment style involves a negative view of self and a positive view of others. Fearful attachment styles experience subjective distress and avoid social situations. The dismissing attachment style is equivalent to the avoidant attachment style. This study aims to examine the different attachment styles and their relationship with perceived social support and homesickness among outstation students in Bengaluru.

### *Objectives*

On the basis of review of literature, the present study focuses on the role of attachment styles on perceived social support and homesickness among out-station students and to find the relationship of perceived social support and homesickness. It also emphasis whether gender differences in perceived social support, self-esteem and homesickness among out-station students.

### *Hypotheses*

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There would be no significant relationship between the dimensions of perceived social support and homesickness among outstation students.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There would be no significant differences in the dimensions of homesickness and perceived social support between male and female students

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Participants*

A sample of 297 (N=297) adolescents were taken for the study (145 males and 152 females) between the age group of 18 to 25 years. The study was conducted in Bengaluru and the sample were taken from the outstation students from various colleges in Bengaluru. Undergraduate as well as Postgraduate students were selected. The students who had completed their pre university in Bengaluru and foreign students were excluded.

### *Measures*

#### **Administration**

Google forms were used to collect data and said forms included a consent form and three self-measure questionnaire namely the Revised Adult Attachment scale, Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) and Utrecht Homesickness scale. The research ethics were followed during the study including informed consent and confidentiality of the results. The Google forms were distributed among students through online platform using WhatsApp, Instagram, LinkedIn etc.

#### *Tools for the study (Reliability and Validity)*

- 1. Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet, et al., 1988):** MSPSS consists of 12 questions which is answered in a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree), with a total score range from 12 to 84. A total score of 50 or more represents good perceived social support. The scale is divided into further sub variables like family subscales, friends subscale and significant others subscales. Total score is calculated by mean of all subscales divided by 12. There is no reverse scoring. The MSPSS has been identified as having high internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ : 0.92).
- 2. Revised Adult Attachment scale 1996 (RAAS):** It is an 18-item self-report scale that asks participants to rate the extent to which they agree with the statements using 5-point Likert scale (where, 1- not at all characteristic of me, 5 - very characteristic of me). Collins's RAAS is a modified version of Adult Attachment scale developed by Collins and Read. This scale consists of three dimensions; Close, Depend and Anxiety and the 4 attachment styles given by Bartholomew and Horowitz, viz. Secure, Fearful, Preoccupied and Dismissive. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was found to be .82 (Close), .80 (Depend), .83 (Anxiety).
- 3. Utrecht Homesickness scale (2002):** It was developed by Stroebe, Van Vliet, Hewstone, and Willis (2002) consisting of five subscales; "Missing Family", "Loneliness", "Missing Friends", "Adjustment Difficulties", and "Ruminations about Home". These five subscales include 20 items, each of which is scored with a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from "not at all" to "very strong" for which higher scores indicate a higher level of homesickness (Stroebe, et al., 2002). Stroebe et al. reported internal reliability estimates of .94 for the total score and .90, .87, .88, .80 and .85 for the Missing Family, Missing Friends, Adjustment Difficulties, Ruminations About Home and Loneliness subscale.

### *Procedure*

Participants were selected by purposive sampling. It is a non-probability technique where participant conformed to certain criteria are purposefully selected. The study was completely adhere to the ethics. Participants was the freedom to withdraw from the study at any point if they wish to do so. Any type of communication in relation to the research was done with

## Attachment Styles, Perceived Social Support and Homesickness among Outstation Students

honesty and transparency. The responses of the participants were only used for research purposes.

### Statistical Analysis

Descriptive analysis, Mann-Whitney U test, Spearman correlation, and Kruskal-Wallis test were used to analyze obtained data.

## RESULTS

The final data was analyzed using statistical software SPSS 20. A normality test is used to determine whether the sample data has been drawn from a normally distributed population. The Kolmogorov-Smirnova test was used for interpretation. It was observed that all the three variables namely Attachment styles, Perceived social support and homesickness were not normally distributed i.e. it was found that  $p < 0.05$ . Hence non-parametric statistics was used for the entire study.

**Table 1: The relationship between perceived social support and homesickness**

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>Sig Other</b>	-									
<b>Family</b>	.000**	-								
<b>Friends</b>	.000**	.000**	-							
<b>Total</b>	.000**	.000**	.000**	-						
<b>Adjustment difficulties</b>	.058	.686	.122	.110	-					
<b>Miss Family</b>	.000**	.000**	.001**	.000**	.008*	-				
<b>Miss Friends</b>	.000**	.006*	.000**	.000**	.000**	.000**	-			
<b>Ruminations about home</b>	.102	.013*	.700	.046*	.000**	.000**	.000**	-		
<b>Loneliness</b>	.293	.269	.249	.125	.000**	.000**	.000**	.000**	-	
<b>UHS Total</b>	.009*	.001**	.062	.001**	.000**	.000**	.000**	.000**	.000**	-

\*\*0.05 Level of Significance

From the above table it is seen that there is a significant positive correlation between missing family, miss friends, ruminations about home and UHS total score. There is a negative correlation between loneliness and Total. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected.

**Table 2: Significance of difference in the variables of perceived social support and homesickness between Males and Females (male, N=145 and female N=152)**

Variables	Gender	N	Mean Rank	U	P value
Sig other	Male	145	126.90	7815.500	.000**
	Female	152	170.08		
	Total	297			
Family	Male	145	136.85	9258.500	0.17
	Female	152	160.59		
	Total	297			
Friends	Male	145	134.97	8985.000	0.06*
	Female	152	162.39		
	Total	297			
Total	Male	145	129.70	8221.000	.000**
	Female	152	167.41		
	Total	297			
Adjustment difficulties	Male	145	137.83	9400.000	0.28

### Attachment Styles, Perceived Social Support and Homesickness among Outstation Students

	Female	152	159.66		
	Total	297			
Miss family	Male	145	146.68	10683.500	.648
	Female	152	151.21		
	Total	297			
Miss friends	Male	145	133.38	8755.500	.002*
	Female	152	163.90		
	Total	297			
Ruminations about home	Male	145	153.79	10326.000	.347
	Female	152	144.43		
	Total	297			
Loneliness	Male	145	150.38	10819.500	.786
	Female	152	147.68		
	Total	297			
UHS Total	Male	145	144.83	10415.500	.414
	Female	152	152.98		
	Total	297			

In summary, these results suggest that there are significant differences in perceived social support between male and female students, with female students reporting higher levels of social support from significant others, family, and friends in comparison to male students. It was also found that female students experienced higher levels of homesickness in the aspects of adjustment difficulties, miss family, miss friends, ruminations about home and UHS total. Male students experienced higher levels of loneliness. These findings imply that gender may play a role in perceived social support and homesickness experiences, among outstation students. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected. ( $p < 0.05$ )

### DISCUSSIONS

The aim of the study was to examine the different attachment styles and their relationship with perceived social support and homesickness among outstation students in Bengaluru.

In the present study outstation students getting the support from their friends, family and significant others tend to have lower levels of homesickness. In a study it was found that there is significantly negative relationship between the total score of social support and mental health score and there are significantly positive relationship between homesickness and mental health, and also the variable of adjustment, total scale of social support, homesickness and loneliness can predict the amount of freshmen's mental health. The collected conclusion that with the rise of the amount of social support, the freshmen's mental health will rise, and with the rise of experience of homesickness, the freshmen's mental health will decline. (roodborde et al 2012). In another study it was found that the conceptual significance of perceived support over enacted support in self-reported homesickness has been shown Perceived social support warrants inclusion in explanatory models of homesickness. (Newland & Furnham, 1999)

The study also found that female outstation students experience higher levels of homesickness in comparison to male outstation students. have more social support than males. In a study it was seen that although homesickness was equally common in men and women, women were much more likely to discuss their feelings with others and to respond

## Attachment Styles, Perceived Social Support and Homesickness among Outstation Students

by being more affiliative. Greater anxiety and depression about homesickness were also associated with more confiding behaviour. There was a suggestion that homesick male students were more likely to seek out others, the more common they perceived homesickness to be. (Brewin et al., 1989). In another study the results revealed that perceptions of social support from females were significantly different from those of males. The results also showed that there were substantial gender discrepancies in young adults' capacity for coping, with females typically having greater capacity than males. (Tam et al . 2009)

### *Implications*

The findings suggest the need for helping out-station or international student's psychological wellbeing. Educational schools can offer tools and assistance to aid students in creating more secure attachment patterns, such as peer support groups and counselling services. Interventions can also be created to assist students in learning how to cope with grief, especially for those who might be more susceptible because of their attachment style.

Counselling services can be provided to students who are struggling with homesickness, particularly those who have insecure attachment styles and low levels of perceived social support. Educational institutions can create a supportive environment for outstation students by providing them with opportunities to form social connections, such as through mentorship programs, peer support groups, and extracurricular activities. This can help to foster a sense of community and reduce feelings of homesickness. The study found that students who have different cultural backgrounds than the local population are more likely to experience homesickness. Educational institutions can help to address these cultural differences by providing resources and support for students to adapt to the new cultural environment.

The study highlights the need for further research into the relationship between attachment styles, perceived social support, and homesickness among outstation students. This could include exploring different aspects of social support and attachment styles, as well as investigating the impact of homesickness on other areas of student life, such as mental health and overall wellbeing.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

One's attachment style has a major impact on one's personality and perspective. The support from family, friends and significant others have a major impact on one's mental health. Which can reduce or increase the level of homesickness experienced by an outstation student. An individual with Secure attachment style tends to experience higher levels of perceived social support and lower levels of homesickness. It is the need of the hour that educational institutes should have better access to mental health services for the students in order to build a healthy and secure environment.

### *Scope for Future Research*

The future studies could emphasize on including a larger sample size, having a mixed design approach by making use of interviews from the participants for in depth information. The studies can also target outstation students in various metro polytan cities or including a sample of international students. The future studies could also use a longitudinal approach in order to gain a better understanding of the challenges faced by outstation students.

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## Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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