

Adult Separation Anxiety, Personality and Attachment Styles- An Exploratory Study among Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to evaluate the relationship between separation anxiety, personality and attachment styles among adults and aimed to explore gender differences in variables. The sample size taken was 129, (49 males and 80 females), among the college students staying in hostels, paying guests etc. Adult Separation Anxiety Questionnaire-ASA-27, Big Five Inventory (BFI), Measure of Attachment Styles (MOAS) had been used to measure separation anxiety, personality and attachment style. The findings indicated that adult separation anxiety has a significant relationship with extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and neuroticism, therefore has a negative correlation. Findings that adult separation anxiety has a significant relation with ambivalent attachment style, therefore there is a positive correlation. The findings also indicated that there was no difference in adult separation anxiety, personality and attachment styles among males and females and adult separation anxiety has an influence on personality and attachment styles.

Keywords: *Adult Separation Anxiety, Attachment styles, Big Five Personality Inventory*

Separation anxiety has traditionally been defined and measured as a specific childhood issue. However, the main symptom of separation anxiety—the extreme and often disturbing anxiety in the face of actual or perceived separation, can be dedicated or even adult-oriented. The stress of separation from the mother (or similar figure) is a common development in children (Ainsworth, 1963; Bowlby, 1973) and it is thought that there are changes that make child in close proximity to its adult caregiver (Bowlby, 1973).

Silove, Manicavasagar, and colleagues recently reported that the main symptom of separation anxiety—that is, excessive and often disabling distress in the face of actual or perceived separation from major attachment figures may actually occur during Persistence or emergence into adulthood (Silove et al., 1996; Manicavasagar et al., 1998).

In psychological parlance, "personality" refers to a person's unique and enduring pattern of thinking, feeling, and behaving. In this view, it is clear that "personality" includes almost every aspect of the human experience. Subsequently, our personalities have the potential to significantly influence our well-being. In particular, the quality of our relationships is greatly

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influenced by our personalities. At every moment we receive a huge amount of information from everything that is happening around us in the world. Psychologists use the term "environment" to refer to these external events that happen around us. As we receive this information from our surroundings, it goes through a subjective, internal process of evaluation and interpretation. We start with a subjective evaluation of the information detected by our senses (what we see, hear, etc.) Then an interpretive idea is formed about what we think is happening. In addition, the information is given some meaning and importance. As this happens, we experience a range of feelings of varying intensity about what we think is happening around us. The intensity of the feelings that arise in us is usually determined by the importance we attach to a particular thought. We tend to have very strong feelings about things that are highly important to us and less intense feelings about things that are less important. This process of interpretation (our thoughts) and assigning meaning and importance (our feelings about those thoughts) will then determine our behavioural response to these external events in our environment. In other words, what I think and feel determines how I will behave.

Not only does the environment affect our behaviour, but our behaviour in turn affects the environment. Therefore, there is a dynamic, interactive exchange between the environment and our personalities (what we think and feel and how we behave). This interactive exchange creates a circular feedback loop that leads to the development and maintenance of habitual patterns of exchange between the person and their environment. These habitual patterns form the basis of "personality". So the environment influences the development of our personality and our personalities influence how we react to the environment.

Adult attachment theory (Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003) is an extension of Bowlby and Ainsworth's attachment theory (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1969), which is designed to account for individual differences in cognition, emotion, and behaviour that occur in adolescent and close adult contexts relationships. According to the theory, individual differences in "attachment style" emerges from experiences in previous close relationships, beginning with attachment relationships between children and their primary caregivers. Since Wirst was proposed in 1987, many studies (reviewed by Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003) have shown that measures of attachment style are associated in theoretically predictable ways with mental processes related to close relationships, behavior observed in so relationships and outcomes of such relationships, such as subjective (e.g., satisfaction) and objective (eg separation or divorce). In recent years, many studies have included both individual difference measures and experimental manipulations and have shed light on some of the mental processes, many of them implicit, that underlie variation in attachment style (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003).

In this paper we are going to study if there is any relation among adult separation anxiety personality and attachment styles, if there is any difference of adult separation anxiety among genders and if there is any influence of adult separation anxiety on personality and attachment styles.

Need of the study

The purpose behind our study is to find out if people who move away from their secure base, especially students who move away from home for the first time for college are prone to develop separation anxiety. Moving away from home for studies is considered to be a major life change and can therefore lead to stress and be anxiety provoking. This paper aims

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to study how separation anxiety affects their well-being and functioning drastically in academics and social circles, the change in the environment could also act as the precipitating factor to an underlying predisposed condition. (Legg & Nall, 2018). This study gives us a good grasp of varying factors; personality, attachment styles and gender differences complementing or contradicting each other in the development of separation anxiety. It helps us get an overview of this challenge faced by the students. The cultural factors and the default family structures unique to our area of study can help us determine if the occurrence of separation anxiety in relation to the variables differ due to these constraints.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives

The objectives are as follows:

1. To evaluate the relationship between personality, attachment styles and separation anxiety among college students.
2. To evaluate the relationship between personality on separation anxiety among college students.
3. To evaluate the relationship between attachment style and separation anxiety among college students.
4. To evaluate the influence of personality and attachment styles on separation anxiety among college students.
5. To explore the gender differences in separation anxiety, personality and attachment styles among college students

Hypotheses

1. Ho1: There is no relationship between adult separation anxiety, personality and attachment styles.
2. Ho2: There is no significant difference of Adult Separation Anxiety among males and females.
3. Ho3: There is no significant influence of Adult Separation Anxiety on Personality and Attachment Styles.

Participants

The sample of the present study consisted of 129 young adults residing in all parts of India, who fall in the age group of 18-25 years at the time of data collection. The data was collected using a convenience sampling method.

Materials

Adult Separation Anxiety Scale (ASA-27). The ASA-27 and the notion that separation anxiety can be diagnosed in adulthood were developed by Manicavasagar's and Silove's group over the course of several studies. The measure shows convergent validity with interview assessments of ASA and childhood separation anxiety (Cyranowski et al., 2002) and internal consistency estimates ranging from 0.89 to 0.93 in a variety of samples, including cross-culturally with Turkish and Bangla translations of the measure (Dirioz, Alkin, Yemez, Onur, & Eminagaoglu, 2011; Islam & Khanam, 2017; Kirsten et al., 2008; Kohlhoff, Barnett, & Eapen, 2015).

Big Five Inventory (BFI-10). The BFI-10 is a 10-item scale measuring the Big Five personality traits Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and

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Openness. The scale was developed based on the 44-item Big Five Inventory (BFI-44; John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991; Rammstedt, 1997) and designed for contexts in which respondents' time is severely limited. Test-retest correlations suggest acceptable reliability. Correlations with other Big Five instruments, correlations between self and peer ratings, and associations with sociodemographic variables suggest good validities of the BFI-10 scores. Several studies demonstrate acceptable reliability estimates for the BFI-10. In a sample of American students, Rammstedt and John (2007) demonstrated test-retest correlations between $r=.65$ (Openness) and $r=.79$ (Extraversion) over a period of 6 to 8 weeks. Comparable results were found for the German BFI-10 items in several studies. For example, Rammstedt et al. (2014) reported retest correlations between $r=.49$ (Neuroticism) and $r=.62$ (Openness) over a period of 6 weeks. Factorial validity: The correlations among the Big Five scales are low, ranging from $r=.08$ to $r=.13$ in all US and German samples (Rammstedt & John, 2007). Furthermore, factor analyses reveal a simple-structure of the items with substantial loadings on the convergent factor (averaged .64) and negligible secondary loadings on the four other factors (averaged .08) (Rammstedt & John, 2007; Rammstedt et al., 2013; Rammstedt et al., 2014).

Measure of Attachment Style. This scale was constructed to assess the attachment patterns of the individual. Initially an item pool was gathered for the scale keeping in mind the attachment patterns proposed by Ainsworth et al. (1970, 1986). Before administering the scale a number of experts in this particular area were asked to review the items for appropriateness. After their feedback it was decided to select 40 items. These 40 items were tested on a sample of 1000 individuals. Each item was rated on a 5 point Likert type rating scale ranging from 1 "Strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree". The higher score shows the dominant attachment pattern. For establishing the internal consistency reliability: Cronbach's alpha is used which was found to be 0.80 for the entire scale.

Data Collection

Data was collected through the Google form with the informed consent of the participants. Confidentiality- was assured. 129 young adults participated in the study and all met the inclusion criteria.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic data of the participants

Demographic Data	N	%
Age		
18-21	38	29.45
22-25	91	70.54
Gender		
Male	49	38
Female	80	62
Marital Status		
Married	6	4.7
Unmarried	123	95.3
Residence		
Hostel	13	10.1
PG	42	32.6

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Apartment	63	48.8
Other	11	8.5
Socio- economic Status		
Upper Class	8	6.2
Upper Middle	48	37.2
Middle Class	60	46.5
Lower Middle Class	9	7
Lower Class	4	3.1

Table 1 shows the demographic data of the participants regarding age, gender, marital status, area of residence, qualifications, socio-economic status. The table shows the N (total no. of participants) and % (percentage) of participants. The table shows the highest number of participants belonging to the age category of 22-25 years and were females.

The percentage of participants belonging to 18-21 years is 29.45% and to 22-25 years is 80.54%. The percentage of males is 38% and females is 62 %. Thus, the participation of females in the study was higher. Most participants were from a middle-class background, participants belonging to the upper class was 6.2%, upper middle class was 37.2%, lower middle class was 7% and lower class was 3.1 %. The percentage of participants based on their marital status was 4.7% for married and 95.3 for unmarried.

Based on their living status most of the participants are currently residing in apartments. The percentage of participants currently living in apartments was 48.8%.

Table 2 shows the relationship between adult separation anxiety and sub-dimensions of personality and attachment styles.

Variable	n	r	p
Personality			
Extraversion	129	-0.422*	0
Agreeableness	129	-0.374*	0
Conscientiousness	129	-0.273*	0.002
Neuroticism	129	-0.383*	0
Openness	129	-0.012*	0.897
Attachment Styles			
Ambivalent	129	0.402*	0
Avoidant	129	0.119*	0.179
Secure	129	0.133*	0.132

**p<0.01 level*

Table 2 shows the relationship between adult separation anxiety and sub-dimensions of personality and attachment styles. Analysis of the table shows the correlation between the sub dimensions of personality, in extraversion the correlation coefficient ($r = -0.422^*$) and the corresponding p value (<0.01) with relation to adult separation anxiety which is significant at 0.000 level hence, there is a negative correlation. In agreeableness the correlation coefficient ($r = -0.374^*$) and the corresponding p value (<0.01) with relation to adult separation anxiety which is significant at 0.000 level hence, there is a negative

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correlation. In conscientiousness the correlation coefficient ($r = -0.273^*$) and the corresponding p value (<0.01) with relation to adult separation anxiety which is significant at 0.002 level hence, there is a negative correlation. In Neuroticism the correlation coefficient ($r = -0.383^*$) and the corresponding p value (<0.01) with relation to adult separation anxiety which is significant at 0.000 level hence, there is a negative correlation. In openness the correlation coefficient ($r = -0.012^*$) and the corresponding p value (<0.01) with relation to adult separation anxiety which is significant at 0.897 level hence, there is a negative correlation.

It can be interpreted from these findings that adult separation anxiety has a significant relationship with extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and neuroticism, therefore has a negative correlation. The result shows there is no statistically significant relationship between adult separation anxiety and openness.

Analysis of the table 1 also shows the correlation between the sub-dimensions of attachment styles, in ambivalent the correlation coefficient ($r = -0.402^*$) and the corresponding p value (<0.01) with relation to adult separation anxiety which is significant at 0.000 level hence, there is a positive correlation. In avoidant the correlation coefficient ($r = -0.119^*$) and the corresponding p value (<0.01) with relation to adult separation anxiety which is significant at 0.179 level hence, there is a positive correlation. In Secure the correlation coefficient ($r = -0.133^*$) and the corresponding p value (<0.01) with relation to adult separation anxiety which is significant at 0.132 level hence, there is a positive correlation.

It can be interpreted from these findings that adult separation anxiety has a significant relation with ambivalent attachment style, therefore there is a positive correlation. There is no statistically significant relationship between adult separation anxiety and avoidant & secure attachment style.

Thus, the null hypothesis “There is no relationship between adult separation anxiety, personality and attachment styles” is partially accepted.

The result is supported by previous studies. According to a study by Mikulincer and Shaver (2007), emerging adults tend to display a higher level of anxious attachment in romantic relationships compared to an avoidant attachment style. However, the study also found a positive and significant correlation between anxious and avoidant attachment styles, suggesting that individuals may utilize both attachment styles in their romantic relationships. To further support this finding, a study by Fraley, Heffernan, Vicary, and Brumbaugh (2011) also reported a positive correlation between anxious and avoidant attachment styles in both romantic and non-romantic relationships. This suggests that individuals who exhibit high levels of anxiety in their romantic relationships may also exhibit avoidance behaviours in other interpersonal relationships.

Overall, these studies suggest that individuals may employ both anxious and avoidant strategies in their romantic attachment styles, which could lead to a complex and potentially problematic relationship dynamic.

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Table 3 shows comparison of Adult Separation Anxiety based on gender

Variable	Category	n	Mean rank	Z	Sig 2 tailed
Adult separation anxiety	Male	49	70.45	-1.296	0.195
	Female	80	61.66		

Table 3 represents the adult separation anxiety on the basis of gender. The result indicated that there is no significant difference of adult separation anxiety on the basis of gender. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted which states that, there is no significant difference of Adult Separation Anxiety among males and females.

Mann Whitney u-test was conducted to see the difference in adult separation anxiety scores for male and female. There was no significant difference in the scores for male (n= 49), (M= 70.45) and female (n=80), (M= 80) types; The calculated z value for adult separation anxiety is -1.296 with corresponding significant value of 0.195.

The current research shows that there is not much difference between male and female scores in relation to adult separation anxiety. However, the data of the current research is unequal and does not depict an equal population of male and females. There is a huge gap between the population of both genders.

Table 4 shows Influence of Adult Separation Anxiety on Personality and Attachment styles

Independent Variable	B	SE B	b	F	R ²
(Constant)	54.48	11.168		9.425	0.386
Extraversion	-3.198	1.204	-2.46		
Agreeableness	-2.311	1.138	-0.181		
Conscientiousness	0.513	1.15	0.04		
Neuroticism	-2.681	1.021	-0.221		
Openness	-0.25	0.921	-0.021		
Ambivalent	0.917	0.223	0.372		
Avoidant	-0.01	0.206	-0.004		
Secure	-0.133	0.276	-0.04		

Multiple Regression was conducted to see the influence of adult separation anxiety on personality and attachment styles. The calculated f value is 9.425 with corresponding significant value of <0.01. The value of R2 is 0.386. This showed that the percentage of the contribution of independent variables, personality and attachment styles to the dependent variable adult separation anxiety is 38.6%. The result indicates that adult separation anxiety has an influence on personality and attachment styles.

The result is supported by previous studies. In one of the studies the authors investigated a mediational model demonstrating that memories of separation anxiety symptoms in childhood influence anxious romantic attachment only in conjunction with current separation anxiety symptoms. Specifically, the study found that young adults who report

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experiencing both childhood memories of separation anxiety symptoms and adult separation anxiety symptoms tend to display a higher level of anxious attachment in their close relationships. (Ein-Dor, Doron, Solomon, & Mikulincer, 2018).

CONCLUSION

The present study aims to investigate the relationship between adult separation anxiety, personality, attachment styles. Also, to understand if there is any significant impact of adult separation anxiety on personality and attachment styles. And to understand if there is any significant difference in adult separation anxiety in young adults based on gender. The study showed there is a relationship between adult separation anxiety, personality and attachment styles and that adult separation anxiety affects personality and attachment style by 38.6. It was also found that there is no significant difference in adult separation anxiety among males and females. Therefore, we can conclude that there is a relationship between variables and influence of adult separation anxiety in personality and attachment styles

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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