

The Impact of Attachment Styles, Attachment-Related Affect on Quality of Life in Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study is investigating the influence of attachment styles and attachment-related affect on the quality of life in young adults. A sample of 200 young adults aged between 18-30 years participated in the study. Adult Attachment Scale (AAS) by Collins and Read in 1990, Positive and Negative Affect Schedule developed by David Watson, Lee Anna Clark, and Auke Tellegen in 1988 and Quality of Life Scale (QOLS) developed by McDowell in 1983 were used to measure the variables in the study. Pearson's correlation coefficient and Linear Regression were used for statistical analysis of data. The findings indicated that perceived social support was positively correlated to psychological wellbeing. Implications are discussed.

Keywords: *Attachment Styles, Attachment-Related Affect, Quality of Life, Young Adults, Correlational Design, Cultural Context*

Attachment Theory, developed by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth in the 1960s and 70s, is a psychological model that describes the dynamics of long-term interpersonal relationships between humans. At its core is the idea that an infant's earliest experiences with caregivers lead to lasting mental representations or "internal working models" that shape their patterns of relating to others in childhood and beyond (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Ainsworth's groundbreaking "Strange Situation" study directly observed attachment patterns among infants aged 12-18 months (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Securely attached infants were distressed when separated from caregivers but easily calmed upon reunion. Anxious-avoidant infants appeared indifferent to separation and avoided caregivers upon return. Anxious-resistant infants were highly distressed by separation and ambivalent toward caregivers when reunited. Modern attachment research explores how processes unfold across the lifespan in domains like romantic partnerships and psychotherapy (Levy et al., 2018). A study found attachment security primes increased environment exploration and cognitive openness (Muris et al., 2021). There is focus on how changing contexts reshape internal working models and attachment behavior dynamically over time.

Through repeated interactions and experiences with their caregivers, infants develop internal working models – mental representations that shape their expectations, emotions, and

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behaviors in close relationships throughout their lives (Johnson et al., 2010). The quality and responsiveness of caregiving during these formative years contribute to the development of distinct attachment styles, which can be broadly categorized as secure, anxious, or avoidant (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Numerous studies demonstrate attachment insecurity's negative impacts across multiple QOL domains. A recent systematic review found insecure attachment was associated with poorer physical and mental health-related QOL (Evans et al., 2022). Anxious attachment predicts lower life satisfaction, happiness, and self-esteem (Karr et al., 2022). Avoidant attachment relates to impaired social support, loneliness, and relationship dissatisfaction (Bernardon et al., 2011; Chong et al., 2022). Those with unresolved trauma/disorganized attachment show the greatest psychosocial impairments (Paetzold et al., 2015). Conversely, attachment security promotes resilience and enables flexibly seeking close support, enhancing QOL (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2007).

METHODOLOGY

Aim

The study's aim is to understand how attachment styles (anxious, avoidant), emotions tied to attachment (positive/negative affect), and quality of life are interconnected among young adults in India.

Objectives

- To examine the nuanced relationship between attachment styles, attachment-related affect, and quality of life among young adults in India.
- To assess if there is a significant relationship between anxious attachment style and quality of life in young adults.
- To explore whether avoidant attachment style significantly influences the quality of life among young adults.
- To investigate the correlation between attachment-related affects and quality of life in young adults.
- To examine the extent to which attachment styles predict the quality of life in this demographic.
- To identify potential predictors of quality of life based on attachment-related affect, offering valuable insights for targeted interventions and support systems.

Hypotheses

- H₀₁- There is no significant relationship between attachment styles and attachment-related affects.
- H₀₂- There is no significant relationship between anxious attachment style and the quality of life in young adults.
- H₀₃- There is no significant relationship between avoidant attachment style and the quality of life in young adults.
- H₀₄- There is no significant relationship between attachment-related affect (e.g., trust, anxiety, satisfaction) and the quality of life in young adults.
- H₀₅- There is no significant impact of attachment styles on quality of life.
- H₀₆- There is no significant impact of attachment-related affect on quality of life.

Sample

The study was conducted through the descriptive survey method of research on a sample of young adults selected from Bangalore, Karnataka between the age group of 18 and 30. The convenience sampling method was used to select 200 young adults for the study.

Tools Used

- 1. Adult Attachment Scale (AAS)**- This test was created by Collins and Read in 1990, and assesses attachment styles. It categorizes individuals into secure, anxious, or avoidant attachment styles. The Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS) is a self-report scale designed by Collins and Reid that asks participants to assess their relationship-building skills and describe how their attachment is shaped in a close relationship. It includes 18 questions designed based on secure, avoidant, and ambivalent attachments. Each statement is scored based on a 5-point Likert scale (0=completely disagree to 5=completely agree) (Craig *et al.*, 2009). Those statements with higher scores are considered as an individual's attachment style. Collins and Reid (1990, from the chaste, 1380) report Cronbach's alpha coefficient of subscales secure, avoidant, and ambivalent attachment as 0.81, 0.78, and 0.85
- 2. Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)**- This test was developed by David Watson, Lee Anna Clark, and Auke Tellegen in 1988. It is a widely employed self-report measure designed to evaluate affective states, consisting of 20 items divided into positive and negative affect subscales. Each item prompts respondents to rate their experiences of specific emotions on a 5-point Likert scale. Scoring involves calculating separate totals for positive and negative affect items, ranging from 10 to 50, where higher scores indicate stronger positive affect and weaker negative affect. Internal consistency for the PANAS has been robust, with reported coefficients between .86 and .90 for positive affect and .84 and .87 for negative affect, while test-retest reliability over one week yielded coefficients of .79 and .81 respectively. Validity assessments have shown correlations with measures such as the Hopkins Symptom Checklist and Beck Depression Inventory, indicating its effectiveness in assessing affective states across various contexts (Watson *et al.*, 1988).
- 3. Quality of Life Scale (QOLS)**: This test was created by John Flanagan and later modified by Carol S Burckhardt, consists of 16 items. This instrument assesses an individual's overall quality of life, spanning various domains. It is a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 7 = "Delighted" to 1 = "Terrible", the higher score indicates better quality of life. The QOLS has demonstrated robust reliability, with test-retest reliability coefficients exceeding 0.80. Additionally, it exhibits good validity, effectively capturing an individual's subjective well-being and life satisfaction, making it a valuable tool for research and clinical assessment.

Procedure

This research utilized a correlational design to explore how attachment styles and emotions tied to attachment (like anxiety or happiness) were associated with quality of life in young Indian adults. The study aimed to fill a gap in understanding these factors within the specific cultural context of India. Researchers investigated connections between these variables but did not claim one caused the other. By examining a diverse sample of young adults (18-30 years old) across India, the study hoped to identify how attachment styles and related emotions might have influenced overall well-being. Ethical guidelines were strictly followed throughout the research process.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the findings. The data was analyzed using IBM SPSS-2.0. Mean and standard deviation were employed in descriptive statistics, and Pearson's correlation approach and linear regression was applied in inferential statistics.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
Anxious Attachment Style	200	6	30	17.12	6.23
Avoidant Attachment Style	200	15	44	31.90	6.22
Positive Affect	200	10	50	30.41	8.19
Negative Affect	200	10	50	27.16	8.40
Quality of Life	200	16	112	82.18	16.79
Valid N (listwise)	200				

**p< 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The descriptive statistics presented in table 1 offer a comprehensive overview of the variables examined in the study. The variables include Anxious Attachment Style, representing anxious attachment scores ranging from 6 to 30 with a mean of 17.12 (SD = 6.233), and Avoidant Attachment Style, reflecting avoidant attachment scores ranging from 15 to 44 with a mean of 31.90 (SD = 6.229). Additionally, Positive Affect denotes positive affect scores ranging from 10 to 50 with a mean of 30.41 (SD = 8.194), while Negative Affect represents negative affect scores ranging from 10 to 50 with a mean of 27.16 (SD = 8.402). Lastly, Quality of Living encompasses quality of life scores ranging from 16 to 112 with a mean of 82.18 (SD = 16.793). Bowlby (1973) emphasized the importance of understanding the impact of separation anxiety and anger on attachment styles. More recently, Nourialegha et al. (2023) explored the association between attachment style, psychological distress, and quality of life. Their findings suggest that attachment style plays a significant role in predicting psychological distress and quality of life.

Table 2: Correlation Between Attachment Styles (Anxious and Avoidant) & Attachment Related Affect (Positive and Negative Affects)

Variables	N	M	SD	1	2	3	4
Anxious Attachment Style	200	17.12	6.23	1	.61**	-.13*	.38**
Avoidant Attachment Style	-	31.90	6.22	-	1	-.33	.26**
Positive Affect	-	30.41	8.19	-	-	1	.07
Negative Affect	-	27.16	8.40	-	-	-	1

**p< 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The mean score for the anxious attachment style is 17.12, for the avoidant attachment style it is 31.90, for the positive affect it is 30.41 and for the negative affect it is 27.16 according to Table 2. The anxious attachment style score is 6.23, for avoidant attachment style it is 6.22, for positive affect it is 8.19 while for negative affect it is 8.40 in terms of standard deviation. The high standard deviations across all variables indicate considerable variability in scores within the dataset. The findings displayed a significant (significant at the 0.01 level) strong positive association (r= .38) between anxious attachment style and negative affect, which therefore reject the null hypothesis that states that there is no significant relationship between attachment styles and attachment-related affects. As anxious attachment style gets triggered, negative affect also rises. It also showed a negative correlation between avoidant attachment style and positive affect (r= -.33) indicating that as avoidant attachment style increases, positive affect decreases whereas there was a significant (significant at the 0.01 level) positive association (r= .26) between avoidant attachment style and negative affect, implying that as one variable rises the other follows in the same direction. There are studies that found that individuals with anxious attachment orientations exhibit hypervigilance to

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social cues, leading to heightened sensitivity to rejection and abandonment fears, which in turn contribute to elevated levels of negative affectivity (Lopez, 1995; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003).

Table 3: Correlation Between Anxious Attachment Styles & Quality of Life

Variables	N	M	SD	1	2
Anxious Attachment Style	200	17.12	6.23	1	-.37**
Quality of Life	-	82.18	16.79	-	1

** $p < 0.01$ level (2-tailed)

The mean score for anxious attachment style is 17.12 and for quality of life is 82.18. The score for anxious attachment style is 6.23 and for quality of life is 16.79 in terms of standard deviation. The correlation analysis unveiled a significant negative correlation between anxious attachment style and quality of life, $r = -.365$, $p < .01$. This suggests that individuals with higher levels of anxious attachment tend to report lower quality of life. The negative sign of the correlation coefficient indicates an inverse relationship, implying that as levels of anxious attachment increase, quality of life tends to decrease. This finding indicates that individuals who exhibit higher levels of anxious attachment may experience lower satisfaction and well-being in various aspects of their lives which rejects the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between anxious attachment style and the quality of life in young adults. Kawamoto (2023) highlighted the effect of attachment on the development of self-concept and self-esteem, indicating that individuals characterized by anxious attachment reported low levels of self-esteem. Psychological well-being is also significantly influenced by the quality of the individual's relationships. Stable and positive romantic relationships, which are promoted by a secure attachment style, are associated with higher levels of psychological well-being and lower levels of distress and psychological discomfort.

Table 4: Correlation Between Avoidant Attachment Styles & Quality of Life

Variables	N	M	SD	1	2
Avoidant Attachment Style	200	31.90	6.22	1	-.34**
Quality of Life	-	82.18	16.79	-	1

** $p < 0.01$ level (2-tailed)

The mean scores for both variables are as follows for avoidant attachment style it is 31.90, for quality of life it is 82.18. The standard deviations are 6.22 and 16.79 for avoidant attachment style and quality of life respectively. The correlation analysis revealed a significant negative correlation between quality of life and avoidant attachment style, $r = -.345$, $p < .01$. The negative sign of the correlation coefficient suggests an inverse relationship, implying that as levels of avoidant attachment increase, quality of life tends to decrease, implying that the null hypothesis has been rejected and that there is no significant relationship between avoidant attachment style and the quality of life in young adults. This finding underscores the importance of considering attachment styles in understanding individuals' subjective well-being. Individuals characterized by higher levels of avoidance may encounter challenges in forming close, supportive relationships, which could detrimentally affect their overall quality of life. Insecure attachment (avoidant and anxious attachment), anxiety, and depressive symptoms were shown to be positively correlated in cancer patients, while social support was found to be negatively correlated (Nissen, 2016). The findings of a previous systematic review by Nicholls et al. (2014), which similarly discovered a relationship between the anxiety dimension and depression, increased anxiety,

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decreased social well-being, and worse well-being, are in line with these results. Depressive symptoms, a lower quality of life, and lower well-being were also linked to avoidant attachment.

Table 5: Correlation Between Attachment-Related Affect (Positive and Negative) & Quality of Life

Variables	N	M	SD	1	2	3
Positive Affect	200	30.41	8.19	1	0.72	0.16
Negative Affect	-	27.16	8.40	-	1	-0.35
Quality of Life	-	82.18	16.79	-	-	1

** $p < 0.01$ level (2-tailed)

Table 5 indicated that the mean score for positive affect was 30.41 (SD = 8.194) and for negative affect was 27.16 (SD = 8.402), based on a sample size of N = 200. Quality of life scores had a mean of 82.18 (SD = 16.793) in the same sample. The correlation analysis revealed several significant associations among the variables. Positive affect showed a positive but non-significant correlation with quality of life ($r = .161$, $p = .023$). Negative affect exhibited a significant negative correlation with quality of life ($r = -.350$, $p < .001$). Additionally, there was a significant negative correlation between negative affect and positive affect ($r = .072$, $p = .308$). These findings suggest that while positive affect may have a modest positive association with quality of life, negative affect appears to be more strongly related to lower quality of life, rejecting the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between attachment-related affect (e.g., trust, anxiety, satisfaction) and the quality of life in young adults. This is consistent with Anderson et al.'s (2022) work, which demonstrated that anxiously attached individuals reported lower QOL mediated by rumination and interpersonal conflict, a pattern amplified by relationship-specific attachment insecurity.

Table 6: Linear regression analysis of Attachment Styles on Quality of Living.

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Standardized β	t-value	Model Summary
Anxious Attachment Style	Quality of Living	-.24	-2.96	R ² =0.15 F=18.33 Sig=0.000
Avoidant Attachment Style				

** $p < 0.01$ level * $p < 0.05$

Table 6 revealed the results of the regression analysis which showed significant associations between attachment styles and quality of life. Both anxious and avoidant attachment styles exhibit negative coefficients, indicating that higher levels of these attachment styles are linked to lower reported quality of life rejecting the null hypothesis that there is no significant impact of attachment styles on quality of life. Specifically, individuals with elevated levels of anxious attachment tend to experience lower quality of life, as evidenced by the significant negative coefficient ($\beta = -0.662$, $p = .003$). Similarly, those with higher levels of avoidant attachment also report lower quality of life, supported by the significant negative coefficient ($\beta = -0.524$, $p = .020$). Persistently seeking reassurance is assumed to result in confrontation with others, which in turn leads to alienation from others; conflict and alienation are seen to validate or amplify an individual's attachment insecurity (Sherry et al., 2014). People with high avoidant attachment frequently perceive other people as unreliable

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and shy away from them when they're under stress (Feeney & Ryan, 1994). According to Calvo et al. (2018), there appears to be a correlation between increased levels of attachment anxiety and avoidance and worse psychological well-being. Because they increase psychological rigidity, reduce resilience, and lower expressive awareness, attachment anxiety and avoidance can have a serious negative impact on a person's wellbeing.

Table 7: Linear regression analysis of Attachment-Related Affect on Quality of Living.

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Standardized β	t-value	Model Summary
Positive Affect	Quality of Living	0.18	2.85	R ² =0.15
Negative Affect		-0.36	-5.54	F=18.4 Sig=0.000, 0.005

** $p < 0.01$ level * $p < 0.05$

The regression analysis revealed a significant impact of attachment-related affect on quality of life, rejecting the null hypothesis (H06). Specifically, both positive affect and negative affect had significant effects on quality of life. Positive affect showed a positive standardized coefficient ($\beta = .187$, $p = .005$), indicating that higher levels of positive affect were associated with higher quality of life. Conversely, negative affect displayed a negative standardized coefficient ($\beta = -.364$, $p < .001$), suggesting that higher levels of negative affect were linked to lower quality of life. Overall, the model demonstrated statistical significance, $R^2 = .157$, $F(2, 197) = 18.400$, $p < .001$. Positive emotions and low negativity might indicate higher quality of life, suggesting an impact of attachment-related affect. Secure attachment, fostered by positive interactions with reliable caregivers, leads to feelings of security and the ability to cope with challenges (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002).

CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on the intricate interplay between attachment styles (anxious, avoidant), attachment-related emotions (positive/negative affect), and various dimensions of quality of life. The findings highlight the significant influence of early attachment experiences and emotional states on an individual's overall well-being.

Specifically, individuals with more prominent attachment insecurity (anxious, avoidant) tend to experience lower levels of positive emotions and higher levels of negative emotions, which are subsequently linked to a diminished quality of life across various dimensions. This link appears to be mediated, at least in part, by attachment-related negative affect, suggesting that insecure attachment styles can negatively impact well-being through heightened negative emotions like fear, anger, and loneliness.

These results underscore the importance of integrating attachment theory into interventions aimed at enhancing quality of life outcomes. By addressing attachment concerns and promoting emotional resilience, individuals can be empowered to cultivate more positive emotional experiences and build stronger relationships, ultimately leading to a higher quality of life.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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