

Research Paper

Exploring Relationship between Attachment Styles, Self-Esteem and Coping Strategies amongst Young Adults

Somya Aggarwal^{1*}, Ms. Jincy Cherian²

ABSTRACT

This research paper investigates the relationship between attachment styles, self-esteem, and coping strategies among young adults. Attachment styles, influenced by early interactions with caregivers, impact lifelong relationships. Self-esteem, reflecting social acceptance perceptions, plays a crucial role. Coping strategies, either problem-focused or emotion-focused, help manage stress. The study explores these constructs' interplay, emphasizing their implications for young adults' psychological development. While attachment styles and self-esteem correlate weakly, self-esteem relates moderately to social support and problem-solving skills. Surprisingly, attachment styles do not significantly affect self-esteem or coping strategies. The findings underscore self-esteem's role in fostering adaptive coping mechanisms during emerging adulthood.

Keywords: Attachment Styles, Self-Esteem, Coping Strategies, Young Adults, Psychological Development, Correlational Research Design, Adult Attachment Scale, Self-Esteem Scale, Coping Strategies Indicator, Social Support

Navigating the transition from adolescence to adulthood is a multifaceted journey characterized by significant psychological, social, and emotional changes. During this period, young adults encounter various challenges that shape their identity, relationships, and overall well-being. Among the key factors influencing their adjustment to adulthood are attachment styles, self-esteem, and coping strategies. This paper aims to explore the intricate interplay between these constructs and their implications for the psychological development of young adults. Attachment theory, proposed by John Bowlby in the 1950s and expanded upon by Mary Ainsworth, provides a framework for understanding the dynamics of interpersonal relationships, particularly in early childhood.

According to this theory, individuals develop internal working models of attachment based on their interactions with primary caregivers. These attachment styles, namely secure, insecure-avoidant, insecure-anxious, and disorganized, shape individuals' perceptions of themselves and others, influencing their ability to form and maintain relationships throughout life. In the transition to adulthood, attachment styles continue to exert a profound influence on individuals' social and emotional functioning. Self-esteem, defined as the

¹M.A. Clinical Psychology, Amity University, Noida, India

²Assistant Professor – I, Amity University, Noida, India

*Corresponding Author

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subjective evaluation of one's worthiness and capabilities, plays a crucial role in young adults' psychosocial development. It serves as a protective factor against the adverse effects of stress and adversity, contributing to resilience and psychological well-being. Individuals with high self-esteem are more likely to adopt adaptive coping strategies, seek social support, and persevere in the face of setbacks. Conversely, low self-esteem is associated with maladaptive coping behaviors, such as avoidance, self-blame, and substance abuse, which can exacerbate psychological distress. Coping strategies represent the cognitive and behavioral efforts individuals employ to manage stressors and regulate emotions. Young adults utilize a variety of coping mechanisms, ranging from problem-solving and seeking social support to avoidance and rumination. In light of the complex interrelationships between attachment styles, self-esteem, and coping strategies, understanding these constructs is essential for promoting the well-being and resilience of young adults. Passanisi, Gervasi, Madonia, Guzzo (2015) [11] conducted a study on attachment, self-esteem and shame in emerging adulthood. The study was conducted on a group of 209 university students and the results suggest that attachment styles and self-esteem might play a crucial role in prediction of experiences of shame in emerging adulthood. Chen, Xu, Wang, Mak (2020) [7] conducted a study on role of self-esteem in the relation between adult attachment styles and mental health and the results showed that both anxious and avoidant adult attachment were associated with low self-esteem.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of exploring the relationship between attachment styles, self-esteem, and coping strategies in young adults is rooted in several key principles and concepts. Bowlby's Attachment Theory proposes that early experiences with primary caregiver's shape individuals' attachment styles, impacting their relationships throughout life (Bowlby, 1969). According to this theory, individuals develop one of four attachment styles: secure, anxious-preoccupied, dismissive-avoidant, or fearful-avoidant (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). These styles are influenced by the caregiver's responsiveness and availability during infancy, which forms a template for future relationships (Bowlby, 1988) [1]. The Sociometer Theory of Self-Esteem, proposed by Leary and Baumeister (2000), suggests that self-esteem functions as an internal monitor of social acceptance. According to this theory, self-esteem fluctuates based on perceptions of social inclusion or exclusion, serving as an indicator of one's relational value. Individuals with high self-esteem believe they are socially accepted, while those with low self-esteem perceive themselves as socially rejected (Leary & Baumeister, 2000) [10]. Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (1984) posits that individuals engage in coping strategies to manage stressors through a dynamic process of appraisal and response. According to this theory, coping strategies are influenced by cognitive appraisals of stressors as either harmful or benign, and as controllable or uncontrollable. Coping efforts involve both problem-focused strategies (addressing the stressor directly) and emotion-focused strategies (regulating emotional responses to the stressor) (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) [9].

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Author Ognibene and Collins (1998) conducted a study on the interplay between adult attachment styles, perceived social support and coping strategies among a group of young adults and concluded that the significance of both attachment styles and perceived social support in shaping individuals' coping strategies in response to stressors, highlighting the need for interventions that promote secure attachment and enhance perceptions of social support to facilitate adaptive coping mechanisms. Byrak, Guler, Sahin (2018) [5] conducted

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a study to examine the role of attachment style, self- concept and coping strategies in explaining the difference in perceived stress factors and stress symptoms in a mediation model and found that the effect of anxious attachment on perceived stress factors and stress symptoms was partially mediated by self- concept and coping styles. Baker (2006) [4] studied the impact of attachment styles on coping strategies, identity development and the perception of social support. Correlation analyses were used and results showed secure attachment to significantly positively correlate with identity moratorium and to negatively correlate with identity foreclosure. Thakkar, Haria, Kumar (2016) [13], The following study was carried to assess the relationship between self-esteem, attachment styles and loneliness in college students and the results showed a negative correlation between self-esteem and loneliness whereas a positive correlation was observed between loneliness and anxiety as well as avoidant attachment styles. Valenti, Farasi (2021) [14] conducted a study that aimed to investigate the factors among coping styles, self-esteem, self-efficacy and personality traits best predicted in a sample of university freshman and the results reported that self-efficacy task, emotion- oriented coping were the most significant predictors together with relational ability and mental flexibility. Williams (2006) [15] investigated the association between early attachment to paternal figures, self-esteem, and adult attachment styles and the results revealed a predominance of preoccupied attachment styles among the sample, alongside intermediate levels of self-esteem.

METHODOLOGY

Problem

To study the relationship between attachment styles, self-esteem and coping strategies in young adults.

Objectives

- To study the Effect of attachment styles on self-esteem of young adults.
- To study the Effect of attachment styles on coping strategies of young adults.
- To study the relationship between self-esteem and coping strategies.

Hypothesis

- There would be a significant effect of attach styles with self-esteem in young adults.
- There would be a significant effect of attachment styles on coping strategies.
- There would be a significant relationship between self-esteem and coping strategies.

Demographic details

The sample consists of 180 people (117 females, 62 males, 1 others). The age group that was taken into account for the study is 18-27 years.

Research design

The research is Quantitative in nature. Correlational research design is used to understand the relationship between attachment styles, self-esteem and coping strategies

Sampling technique

Random snowball convenient sampling has been used for the study.

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Tools

- **Adult Attachment Scale-** Adult Attachment Scale developed by Collins & Read (1990) [8] is an 18-item questionnaire on a 5-point Likert-type Scale and measures “close”, “dependent” and “anxious” adult attachment styles. Reliability on Cronbach’s alpha coefficients are .69 for Close, .75 for Depend, and .72 for Anxiety. Test-retest correlations for a 2-month period were .68 for Close, .71 for Depend, and .52 for Anxiety. The discriminatory validity in anxiety and close-dependence dimension is good. The score of construct-related validity is high.
- **Self-esteem Scale-** Self-esteem scale developed by Morris Rosenberg (1965) [12] is a 10-item scale that measures global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self. All items are answered using a 4-point Likert scale format ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The test-retest reliability for 2-week interval was calculated at 0.85 and the 7-month interval was calculated at 0.63. The test demonstrates concurrent, predictive and construct validity using known groups.
- **Coping Strategies Indicator-** Coping Strategy Indicator (CSI) developed by Dr. Amirkhan1990[2] is a 33-item scale use to measure specifically 3 subscales namely, “problem solving”, “seeking social support” and “avoidance”. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient indicated high reliability for all CSI scales: .928 for seeking support, .894 for problem solving and .839 for avoidance. It has good internal consistency and high construct validity.

Inclusive and exclusive variables-

- Inclusion criteria for the paper would be age range, consent and voluntariness, attachment styles, self-esteem and coping strategies.
- Exclusion criteria includes age, incapacity to consent, language or communication barriers, clinical diagnoses.

RESULT

The correlation matrix shows correlation coefficients between a set of variables and allows seeing which pair of variables have the highest correlation.

In Table 1, there is a weak positive correlation between close attachment style with self-esteem and problem-solving skills, there is also a weak positive correlation between self-esteem and social support and between problem solving skills and avoidance. However, there is a strong positive correlation between problem-solving skills and social support, which is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

TABLE 1: Correlation Matrix

		CAS	SE	PS	SS	AV
CAS	Pearson Correlation	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
SE	Pearson Correlation	.236	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.058				
PS	Pearson Correlation	.108	.416**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.392	.001			
SS	Pearson Correlation	.341**	.262*	.469**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.035	.000		
AV	Pearson Correlation	-.060	-.351**	.028	-.091	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.637	.004	.822	.472	

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In Table 2, there is a weak positive correlation between dependent attachment style and self-esteem, between dependent attachment style and problem-solving skills and between dependent attachment style and social support. The correlation matrix also shows a moderate positive correlation between self-esteem and problem-solving skills, and between problem-solving skills and social support.

TABLE 2: Correlation Matrix

		CAS	SE	PS	SS	AV
DAS	Pearson Correlation	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
SE	Pearson Correlation	.175	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.163				
PS	Pearson Correlation	.053	.495**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.675	.000			
SS	Pearson Correlation	.225	.165	.341**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.072	.189	.005		
AV	Pearson Correlation	-.129	-.418**	.217	-.118	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.305	.001	.083	.350	

In Table 3, there is a moderate positive correlation between self-esteem and problem-solving skills which is statistically significant. There is also a weak positive correlation between problem-solving skills and avoidance and between problem solving skills and social support.

TABLE 3: Correlation Matrix

		AAS	SE	PS	SS	AV
AAS	Pearson Correlation	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
SE	Pearson Correlation	-.091	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.429				
PS	Pearson Correlation	-.096	.317**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.408	.005			
SS	Pearson Correlation	-.030	.248*	.198	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.793	.030	.085		
AV	Pearson Correlation	-.057	-.223	.030	-.201	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.625	.052	.796	.079	

DISCUSSION

Attachment styles, self-esteem, and coping strategies are important constructs in psychology that have been studied extensively in relation to each other. In this discussion, we will analyze the correlation matrices provided to determine if there is a significant effect of attachment styles on self-esteem and coping strategies, as well as a significant relationship between self-esteem and coping strategies in young adults.

First, let us examine the correlation between attachment styles and self-esteem (hypothesis 1). The correlation matrix shows that there is a weak positive correlation between close attachment style and self-esteem ($r = 0.236$, $p = 0.058$), which is not statistically significant after applying the 0.05 threshold. Similarly, there is a weak positive correlation between dependent attachment style and self-esteem ($r = 0.175$, $p = 0.163$), which is also not statistically significant. However, there is a weak negative correlation between anxious attachment style and self-esteem ($r = -0.091$, $p = 0.429$), which is not statistically significant.

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Therefore, we reject the hypothesis that there is a significant effect of attachment styles on self-esteem in young adults.

Next, let us examine the correlation between attachment styles and coping strategies (hypothesis 2). The correlation matrix shows that there is a moderate positive correlation between close attachment style and social support ($r = 0.341$, $p = 0.005$), which is statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). This suggests that individuals with a closer attachment style tend to have better social support systems. However, there are no other statistically significant correlations between attachment styles and coping strategies. Therefore, we reject the hypothesis that there is a significant effect of attachment styles on coping strategies in young adults.

Finally, let us examine the correlation between self-esteem and coping strategies (hypothesis 3). The correlation matrix shows that there is a moderate positive correlation between self-esteem and problem-solving skills ($r = 0.416$, $p = 0.001$), which is statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). This indicates that individuals with higher self-esteem tend to have better problem-solving skills. Additionally, there is a weak positive correlation between self-esteem and social support ($r = 0.262$, $p = 0.035$), which is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). This suggests that individuals with higher self-esteem tend to have better social support systems. Furthermore, there is a moderate negative correlation between self-esteem and avoidance ($r = -0.351$, $p = 0.004$), which is statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). This indicates that individuals with higher self-esteem tend to avoid situations less. Therefore, we accept the hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between self-esteem and coping strategies in young adults.

In summary, the correlation matrices provided do not show a significant effect of attachment styles on self-esteem or coping strategies in young adults. However, there is a significant relationship between self-esteem and coping strategies, with higher self-esteem being associated with better problem-solving skills, better social support systems, and less avoidance. These findings highlight the importance of self-esteem in promoting adaptive coping strategies in young adults.

It is important to note that correlation does not imply causation, and further research is needed to establish the causal relationships between attachment styles, self-esteem, and coping strategies. Longitudinal studies and experimental designs could provide more insight into the directionality and mechanisms of these relationships. Additionally, it would be interesting to examine the role of other factors, such as cultural background, socioeconomic status, and gender, in moderating or mediating the relationships between attachment styles, self-esteem, and coping strategies.

In conclusion, while the correlation matrices provided do not show a significant effect of attachment styles on self-esteem or coping strategies, there is a significant relationship between self-esteem and coping strategies in young adults. These findings underscore the importance of promoting self-esteem in young adults as a means of enhancing their coping abilities and promoting psychological well-being.

Recommendations based on the interpreted data suggest that there is a need for further investigation into the relationship between attachment styles, self-esteem, and coping strategies in young adults. The correlation matrices indicate that there are some significant

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relationships between these variables, particularly in the case of close attachment style and self-esteem, as well as self-esteem and problem-solving skills. These findings suggest that interventions aimed at improving self-esteem and problem-solving skills may be beneficial for young adults with insecure attachment styles.

There are some limitations to the interpreted data that should be taken into account. First, the correlation matrices are based on cross-sectional data, which limits our ability to make causal inferences about the relationships between attachment styles, self-esteem, and coping strategies. Longitudinal or experimental studies are needed to establish the directionality and causality of these relationships. Second, the correlation matrices are based on self-report measures, which are subject to various forms of bias, such as social desirability bias and response distortion. Future research should consider using multiple methods of assessment, such as observational measures or behavioural tasks, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships between attachment styles, self-esteem, and coping strategies.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between attachment styles, self-esteem, and coping strategies in young adults is a complex and dynamic process that has important implications for psychological well-being. Theoretical perspectives suggest that attachment styles can shape self-esteem, which in turn can influence the choice and effectiveness of coping strategies. Empirical research has provided mixed results, with some studies finding significant associations and others finding no or weak associations. However, there is evidence to suggest that certain attachment styles, such as anxious and avoidant attachment, are associated with lower self-esteem and less adaptive coping strategies. Additionally, self-esteem may moderate the relationship between attachment styles and coping strategies, with higher self-esteem being associated with more adaptive coping strategies. Further theoretical and empirical investigation is needed to fully understand the interplay between these variables and to inform the development of interventions aimed at promoting healthy relationships, self-esteem, and coping strategies in young adults.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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