

Role of Dependent Personality Disorder in Romantic Relationship

M. Shriya^{1*}, Bismirty Bhuyan²

ABSTRACT

People with Dependent Personality Disorder (DPD) exhibit an excessive reliance on others for emotional and decision-making support, which can significantly impact their romantic relationships. This study investigates how DPD influences interpersonal behaviours, attachment styles, and conflict-resolution strategies. Individuals with DPD tend to experience imbalanced relationships due to excessive dependency on their partners, leading to reduced relationship satisfaction and increased emotional strain. The study suggests that therapeutic interventions are crucial to help individuals with DPD foster autonomy and achieve balanced romantic relationships.

Keywords: *Dependent Personality Disorder, Communication Habits, Attachment Styles, Conflict-Resolution Approaches, Emotional Reassurance*

Dependent Personality Disorder (DPD) means a strong need to be cared for. People with DPD often act in ways that seem needy or clingy, which can really affect their romantic relationships. They usually fear being left alone and lack confidence in themselves. Because of this, they often depend too much on their partners for emotional and mental support. This can create an uneven balance in the relationship, where one person takes care of the other while the other becomes too dependent. This situation can lead to stress and unhappiness for both partners.

Communication can be tough for those with DPD. They may avoid conflicts and find it hard to stand up for themselves, worrying that any disagreement might harm the relationship. This might lead to shallow conversations and leave important issues unresolved. People with DPD often have an anxious attachment style, meaning they really want closeness and reassurance. This can clash with partners who want more space, creating tension about emotional needs. “There is a significant overlap between anxious attachment styles and Dependent Personality traits, where the fear of abandonment and the need for reassurance often dominate the emotional landscape of romantic relationships”. (Fraley, R. C., & Shaver, P. R, 2000)

In these relationships, solving problems often means steering clear of arguments, with the person who has DPD wanting to keep the peace over speaking up for their own needs. This

¹Student, MSc. Clinical Psychology, Dept. of Psychology, AIBAS.

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-1242-8053>

²Assistant Professor, Dept. of Psychology, Amity University, Bengaluru.

*Corresponding Author

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study looks at how DPD affects romantic relationships, focusing on how people communicate, their attachment styles, and how they solve problems. The goal is to understand how dependence impacts satisfaction in these relationships. By exploring these areas, the research hopes to help develop therapeutic methods that can enhance relationship quality. Approaches like cognitive behavioural therapy, training in communication skills, and therapy focused on attachment might give those with DPD tools to create healthier and more balanced relationships, leading to better satisfaction and stability for both partners. “Dependent Personality Disorder is associated with heightened emotional dependence on romantic partners, which can lead to decreased relationship satisfaction due to the pressure it places on the non-dependent partner to fulfill all emotional needs.” (South, S. C., & Krueger, R. F., 2009)

Need for Study

Given the profound effect that Dependent Personality Disorder (DPD) has on relational dynamics, research on this disorder and its function in romantic relationships is crucial. People with DPD frequently rely too much on their partners to make decisions and provide emotional support, which can result in unbalanced and harmful relationships. This dependency can result in difficulties with intimacy, assertiveness, and personal boundaries, which are key components of a healthy romantic partnership. Furthermore, the fear of abandonment and rejection typical of DPD can lead to anxious attachment styles, controlling behaviours, or even the toleration of abusive relationships. Analyzing the ways in which DPD affects romantic relationships can reveal certain behavioural patterns and provide insight into the emotional demands and challenges that people with the illness encounter. Additionally, by improving therapy approaches that address both the individual and relational aspects of the condition, this research can aid in the development of focused interventions for couples. To increase relationship pleasure, promote healthy attachments, and lower the likelihood of relational dysfunction, it is essential to comprehend how DPD and romantic relationships interact. A study on this subject could close a significant gap in clinical psychology and offer helpful tools for individuals, couples, and clinicians coping with the difficulties presented by DPD, as there is currently a dearth of targeted research in this field.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A study was conducted on ‘the impact of dependent personality traits on romantic relationships’. This study involves 150 individuals diagnosed with Dependent Personality Disorder (DPD) and their partners. Using a mixed-method approach, the researchers employed structured interviews and self-reported questionnaires to assess relationship dynamics. The findings revealed that individuals with DPD displayed a high need for reassurance and emotional support, which often led to imbalanced power dynamics in relationships. Partners of those with DPD reported feeling emotionally drained and burdened by the constant dependency, highlighting the emotional toll it placed on both individuals involved in the relationship (Miller et al, 2006).

A study was conducted on ‘the impact of personality disorders, including Dependent Personality Disorder (DPD), on interpersonal functioning from a cognitive therapy perspective’. They utilize case examples to illustrate how cognitive therapy can address maladaptive behaviours and thought patterns associated with DPD. The study highlights that individuals with DPD often exhibit dysfunctional thoughts that intensify their dependency on partners in romantic relationships, leading to a significant lack of autonomy and self-confidence. These thought patterns contribute to a cycle of reliance, where the fear of

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abandonment and a need for reassurance result in submissive and clingy behaviours, negatively affecting the dynamics of romantic partnerships. (Beck et al, 2004)

A study was conducted on 'Dependent Personality Disorder in the DSM-5: A Clinical and Empirical Review' focusing on the characteristics and interpersonal implications of Dependent Personality Disorder (DPD). The review synthesizes findings from various empirical studies, revealing that individuals with DPD often display heightened levels of submissiveness and dependency in romantic relationships. These tendencies frequently lead to power imbalances, as the DPD individual's excessive need for support and reassurance can cause them to become overly reliant on their partner. This dynamic can strain romantic relationships, resulting in conflicts over autonomy and control, which are central challenges in managing DPD symptoms within intimate partnerships. (Borenstein, 2007)

A study was conducted on 'Romantic Relationship Dysfunction in Personality Disorders' The Role of DPD," examining how Dependent Personality Disorder (DPD) traits affect romantic relationships. The study included participants with various personality disorders and their partners, with a particular focus on DPD. Results revealed that individuals exhibiting DPD traits face significant challenges in romantic relationships, including heightened dependency on their partners, difficulties in making independent decisions, and a tendency toward conflict. The dependency-driven behavior often leads to a lack of autonomy and can create a pattern of over-reliance, resulting in increased tension and misunderstandings within the relationship. (Ryder & Bagby, 2006)

A study was conducted on "Romantic Relationships and Personality Disorders: The Impact of Dependency on Intimacy and Trust." The study focused on how DPD influences core aspects of intimate relationships, such as trust and closeness. Results indicated that individuals with DPD often experience significant difficulties in establishing and maintaining trust and intimacy with their partners, largely due to fears of abandonment and a pervasive need for reassurance. These challenges contribute to relationship instability, as heightened anxiety over potential separation can cause clinginess and dependency-driven behaviours, ultimately straining the romantic bond. (Hopwood, Morey & Donnellan 2013)

A study was conducted on Exploring the Impact of Dependent Personality Traits, "which examined how individuals with Dependent Personality Disorder (DPD) traits manage stress in romantic relationships. The study focused on the role of coping styles and their influence on relationship satisfaction and communication between partners. Findings revealed that individuals with DPD traits tend to rely on passive coping mechanisms, such as avoidance and dependency on their partner for decision-making and emotional support. This reliance on passive strategies often undermines effective communication and reduces mutual understanding, leading to decreased relationship satisfaction and greater relational tension. (Bucher & Lyddon 1998)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Aim

The primary aim of this study is to explore the relationship between Dependent Personality Disorder and romantic relationships.

Research question

- How does Dependent Personality Disorder (DPD) influence communication patterns, attachment styles, and conflict resolution strategies in romantic relationships?

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Objectives

- Look at how DPD impacts how people talk to each other in romantic relationships.
- Think about how DPD changes the ways partners feel connected to each other in these relationships.
- Check how DPD changes the ways couples solve their problems.
- Investigate the emotional effects of DPD on both people in romantic relationships.

Operational Definitions

- **Dependent Personality Disorder (DPD):** A mental health condition characterized by excessive reliance on others for emotional and physical support, resulting in submissive and clinging behaviors.
- **Romantic Relationship:** A voluntary, ongoing partnership characterized by affection, intimacy, and mutual care between two individuals.

Sample

The study included 105 participants aged 18-35, recruited from various colleges and communities within India. Convenience sampling was used, and participants were screened for eligibility.

Inclusion Criteria

- Individuals aged 18-35
- Currently in a romantic relationship

Exclusion Criteria

- Individuals under 18 or over 35
- Individuals not currently in a romantic relationship

Hypotheses

- **Null Hypothesis (H₀):** There is no significant difference in relationship satisfaction between individuals with high levels of dependent personality traits and those with low levels.
- **Alternative Hypothesis (H₁):** Individuals with higher levels of dependent personality traits report lower levels of relationship satisfaction compared to those with lower levels.

Procedure

Participants were recruited via social media and provided informed consent. They completed an online survey that assessed dependent personality traits, relationship satisfaction, and power dynamics in their romantic relationships. The survey was hosted on a secure platform and took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Data were anonymized and securely stored.

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Scale

Scale Name	Items	Scoring	Interpretation
Romantic Dependency Assessment Scale (RDAS)	20 Items	Likert Scale Each statement is rated on a 1 to 5 scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree	20-39: Low Dependency 40-59: Moderate Dependency 60-79: High Dependency 80-100: Very High Dependency

Data Analysis

TABLE 1:

Descriptives

	Total Score	Gender
N	105	105
Missing	0	0
Mean	55.5	1.42
Median	59	1.00
Mode	60.0	1.00
Standard deviation	14.7	0.496
Minimum	25	1.00
Maximum	81	2.00
Shapiro-Wilk W	0.958	0.627
Shapiro-Wilk p	0.002	< .001

The data includes 105 entries, and there are no missing values. The average Total Score is 55.5, with a middle score of 59 and the most common score being 60. This shows that the scores are a bit uneven. The standard deviation is 14.7, which means there is some variation in the scores, which fall between 25 and 81. The average value for Gender is 1.42, with both the middle and most common value being 1.00. This means there are more individuals identified as 1 (likely "Male"). The Shapiro-Wilk test for Total Score shows a value of $W = 0.958$ and a p-value of 0.002, indicating that the scores don't follow a normal distribution. The same test for Gender gives $W = 0.627$ and a p-value less than 0.001, which is what we expect for data that has categories. In summary, the Total Score data has a fair amount of spread and is not normally distributed, while the Gender data shows a clear pattern of categories.

TABLE 2:

One Sample T-Test

		Statistic	df	p
Total Score	Student's t	38.5	104	< .001
Gender	Student's t	29.3	104	< .001

Note. $H_0: \mu = 0$

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The results of the one-sample t-test show clear differences for both factors compared to a mean of 0. For the Total Score, the t-statistic is 38.5 with 104 degrees of freedom, and the p-value is less than 0.001, indicating a strong difference from 0. For Gender, the t-statistic is 29.3 with 104 degrees of freedom, and the p-value is also less than 0.001, which confirms a meaningful difference from 0. This is expected since Gender is usually represented with categories like 1 and 2. These results reveal that both the Total Score and Gender averages are significantly different from 0.

TABLE 3:
Correlation Matrix

		Total Score	Gender
Total Score	Pearson's r	—	—
	df	—	—
	p-value	—	—
Gender	Pearson's r	-0.122	—
	df	103	—
	p-value	0.214	—

The correlation matrix reveals a small negative link between Total Score and Gender. This means that as Gender shifts, usually between categories like 1 and 2, the Total Score tends to go down a little. However, this connection isn't strong enough to matter, shown by a p-value of 0.214, which is higher than the 0.05 level. Since there are 103 degrees of freedom, this tells us that there isn't a real or strong connection between Total Score and Gender.

DISCUSSION

The results show that people who have more dependent personality traits tend to feel less satisfied in their relationships. There doesn't seem to be a strong link between gender and these traits, suggesting that both men and women experience DPD in similar ways. However, it might be worth looking into this further with bigger and more varied groups of participants. The study highlights how behaviors driven by dependency—like needing constant reassurance and struggling to make decisions—can create stress in relationships, which often leads to more tension and conflict.

These results are consistent with earlier research pointing out the emotional pressures and power struggles that can occur in relationships involving those with DPD. That said, because the data doesn't follow a normal distribution, we should be careful about how we interpret these findings. More research that includes larger and more representative groups is necessary to validate these results.

RESULTS

The Total Score varies a bit and does not follow a normal pattern. It is also clearly different from 0 ($p < 0.001$). There is a small, insignificant negative connection between Total Score and Gender ($p = 0.214$), which means there is no real relationship between the two. Since

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there is no relationship between the two variables the alternate hypothesis is rejected while null hypothesis is accepted

Implications

1. **Better Relationship Help:** Knowing how Dependent Personality Disorder (DPD) influences love relationships can help counselors create better ways to support couples.
2. **Improved Communication Tips:** What we learn from studies can lead to better ways for couples, especially where one partner has DPD, to talk and solve problems.
3. **Raising Awareness and Support:** Teaching people about how DPD affects relationships can help partners see harmful behaviors and motivate them to get help, leading to stronger connections.

Limitations

- Clinical samples may not represent the general population with DPD traits.
- Ethical concerns may arise when discussing sensitive topics related to dependency and relationship dynamics.
- Online surveys may lack the depth of in-person interviews

Future Research Suggestions

- **Effects on Partner's Mental Well-Being:** Look into how the mental health of partners who are with people with DPD changes especially regarding feelings of tiredness, stress and worry. And also, to Examine how the mental state of the partner influences the relationship when DPD traits are strong.
- **Digital Communication and DPD:** Look at how digital communication (like texting, social media, and online dating) affects romantic relationships where dependency is a factor. Find out if technology makes these dependency behaviors stronger. And see how people with dependency issues use online communication and if they act differently online compared to when they are in person.
- **Understanding DPD and Ending Relationships:** Look into how DPD affects the way people end relationships and move on after break-ups and Check if people with DPD face special difficulties when trying to end romantic ties and what feelings they may deal with afterward.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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