

A Correlational Study on Relationship Between Adult Attachment Style and Narcissistic Vulnerability Among Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This study is conducted to find the relationship between adult attachment style and narcissistic vulnerability among the teachers who work in schools and colleges. The hypothesis is that there will be no significant relationship between adult attachment style and narcissistic vulnerability. Using the Adult attachment style scale and Hypersensitive narcissism scale (HANS), the relationship is assessed among the teachers working in schools and colleges. Participants were selected from the urban schools and colleges, comprising 200 respondents. Statistical analysis of correlation was conducted to identify significant relationship between adult attachment style and narcissistic vulnerability among the teachers. The result shows that there is no significant relationship between adult attachment style and narcissistic vulnerability among teachers. This shows that the adult attachment style is not related to Narcissistic trait.

Keywords: *Adult attachment style, Narcissistic vulnerability, Teachers*

Narcissism is a personality trait characterized by grandiosity, a need for admiration, and a lack of empathy for others. Individuals with narcissistic tendencies often exhibit a strong sense of entitlement, an exaggerated sense of self-importance, and a tendency to manipulate or exploit others for personal gain. While some degree of narcissism can be a normal and even beneficial trait, excessive narcissism may be associated with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD), a condition that can lead to interpersonal difficulties and emotional distress. Research suggests that narcissism exists on a spectrum, with both vulnerable (insecure and hypersensitive) and grandiose (overtly confident and dominant) subtypes (Miller et al., 2011). The development of narcissistic traits may be influenced by genetic factors, early childhood experiences, and social reinforcement (Campbell & Foster, 2007).

Patterns of attitudes and behaviours centred on an exaggerated feeling of self-importance, a strong desire for excessive attention and adulation, and a lack of empathy for others are referred to as narcissistic behaviour. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5), it is a defining characteristic of narcissistic personality disorder (NPD). Even though not all people with narcissistic features have NPD, these actions can have a detrimental effect on relationships, the workplace, and emotional

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Received: March 16, 2025; Revision Received: April 26, 2025; Accepted: April 29, 2025

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health. Narcissistic people frequently think they are better than other people and demand praise for their alleged superiority. They could overstate their abilities or accomplishments as a result of this inflated self-perception. They frequently aim to be the centre of attention and constantly seek approval and appreciation from others. Because they mostly rely on outside validation, their self-esteem is frequently brittle. The incapacity to comprehend or take into account the needs and feelings of others is a characteristic of narcissistic conduct. They may come across as aloof, callous, or dismissive as a result. Narcissistic people frequently demand special attention and adherence to their rules. When they don't get the benefits they feel they are entitled to, they could become irate or frustrated. They might take advantage of or control people in order to accomplish their objectives. Common strategies include gas lighting, guilt-tripping, and acting vulnerable. Narcissists frequently have deep-seated insecurities despite their seeming confidence. Defensiveness, rage, or even violence can be triggered by criticism or perceived rejection. Narcissism can take many forms and is frequently divided into overt and covert manifestations. Bold, ostentatious actions that openly demonstrate control and conceit. Subtle, with traits of passive-aggressiveness, hypersensitivity to criticism, and introversion. The causes of narcissistic behaviour are multifaceted and frequently stem from early life events. Narcissistic characteristics can be cultivated in children through excessive praise or severe criticism. According to certain research, narcissistic behaviours may have a genetic component. Individualism and competition-focused societies may promote narcissistic tendencies because of their self-centeredness and lack of empathy, narcissists frequently have trouble sustaining healthy relationships. Friends and partners could feel taken advantage of or underappreciated. Conflicts, a poisonous work atmosphere, and poor teamwork can result from narcissistic conduct. When their desire for admiration is not satisfied, those with narcissistic tendencies are more likely to experience anxiety, sadness, and a sense of emptiness.

Narcissism, a personality trait characterized by grandiosity, a need for admiration, and a lack of empathy (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), can have both positive and negative effects in the teaching profession. On one hand, narcissistic teachers may exhibit confidence, charisma, and a strong presence in the classroom, which can engage students and create a dynamic learning environment (Zhang et al., 2021). On the other hand, excessive narcissism can lead to authoritarian teaching styles, diminished student autonomy, and reduced teacher-student rapport, potentially affecting student motivation and learning outcomes (Furtner et al., 2017). Additionally, narcissistic tendencies in teachers may influence their response to feedback, with highly narcissistic individuals being more resistant to criticism and less likely to adjust their teaching methods based on student needs (Nevicka et al., 2018).

Trust, emotional openness, and constructive communication in partnerships are traits of a secure attachment style. It emerges in childhood when parents or guardians reliably and warmly attend to a child's needs. An attachment theory-based concept known as "avoidant attachment style" emerges in early childhood when caregivers routinely downplay or neglect emotional demands. As a result, the person represses their feelings in order to prevent disappointment or rejection. A pattern of interpersonal relationships known as an anxious attachment style is defined by a strong need for intimacy and a dread of being abandoned. People with this style frequently struggle with low self-esteem and heightened emotional sensitivity, which can be traced back to uneven or unpredictable caring during childhood.

Teachers play a crucial role in shaping students' academic and socio-emotional development. One significant yet often overlooked factor in this relationship is the teacher's

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attachment style, which influences how they interact with students, manage classrooms, and provide emotional support. Attachment theory, originally developed by Bowlby (1969) and later expanded by Ainsworth (1979), posits that individuals form internal working models of relationships based on early caregiving experiences. These attachment styles—secure, anxious, avoidant, or disorganized—impact teachers' responsiveness, sensitivity, and ability to foster supportive student-teacher relationships (O'Connor, 2008).

A teacher with a secure attachment style tends to create a warm and structured classroom environment, promoting student engagement and resilience (Pianta, Hamre, & Stuhlman, 2003). In contrast, anxious or avoidant teachers may struggle with emotional regulation, leading to inconsistent interactions that can affect students' sense of safety and motivation (Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011). The impact of teacher attachment styles extends beyond academic performance, influencing students' self-esteem, emotional regulation, and peer relationships (Verschuere & Koomen, 2012).

Teachers are continuously handling emotions and relationships in their profession. Understanding how their adult attachment style might relate to narcissistic vulnerability is key, as it can influence their interactions, leadership, and performance. This research has the potential to enhance teacher preparation, interventions, and overall health, particularly in high-stress settings. In order to support teachers' professional development and lessen burnout, it may be possible to improve their effectiveness, mental health, and coping mechanisms by looking into how insecure attachment causes narcissistic defences. It is essential to comprehend how adult attachment style and narcissistic vulnerability interact, particularly in high-demand occupations like teaching. Adult attachment theory describes how early relational experiences shape an individual's behaviour patterns, emotional control, and interpersonal relationships in later life. Teachers' attachment styles can affect how they manage stress, connect with colleagues and pupils, and handle feedback. Secure attachment is often linked to healthy interpersonal interactions and emotional resilience. In contrast, insecure attachment patterns (anxious or avoidant) might lead individuals to maladaptive coping techniques under professional stress. Narcissistic vulnerability refers to a subtype of narcissism characterized by hypersensitivity to criticism, fragile self-esteem, and defensive interpersonal behaviours. Increased narcissistic vulnerability can affect teachers' capacity to take constructive criticism, resolve conflicts in the classroom, or practice reflective self-improvement. It is distinct from overt narcissistic traits due to its underlying insecurity and capacity for self-doubt. Both their professional growth and the standard of the learning environment may be hampered by this. Teachers frequently deal with difficult circumstances, such as managing the classroom or interacting with parents. Some teachers may experience higher levels of stress at work if their attachment styles and narcissistic vulnerabilities are understood. Teachers' interpersonal styles influence not only their own well-being but also the educational experiences of their students. When a teacher exhibits narcissistic vulnerability, they may unintentionally obstruct empathy, good communication, and classroom rapport. Examining this relationship in a work setting can help to expand attachment theory by showing how it applies to roles requiring a lot of emotional work as well as to personal relationships. There are several reasons to investigate the connection between teachers' narcissistic vulnerability and adult attachment style. It is driven by the desire to understand how intrinsic personality factors affect professional behaviour and well-being in a high-stress, impactful career. With teachers playing a pivotal role in shaping future generations, exploring these dynamics is not only academically enriching but also has

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the potential to inform practical interventions, ultimately leading to better educational outcomes and healthier work environments.

METHODS

Operational definition:

- Adult attachment style – Adult attachment is commonly characterised among dimensions of anxiety and avoidance resulting in four categories: secure individuals, anxious individuals, avoidant individuals, fearful avoidant.
- Narcissism – Extremely self centred with an exaggerated sense of self importance marked by or characteristic of excessive admiration of or infatuation with oneself.

Conceptual definition:

Adult attachment style

“A set of stable patterns in emotional and behavioural responses to close relationships, shaped by early attachment experiences, which influence expectations of support, intimacy, and security in adulthood” (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). A framework of relational behaviours and self-perceptions that influence how individuals seek, maintain, and respond to emotional closeness, based on models of self and others. Bartholomew & Horowitz (1991). A motivational and emotional system that guides interpersonal interactions, affecting how individuals regulate distress, form bonds, and maintain relationships. An enduring pattern of thoughts, emotions, and behaviours in relationships, influenced by early experiences with caregivers and affecting one’s ability to seek comfort and security in close bonds.

Narcissistic vulnerability

Narcissistic vulnerability is characterized by hypersensitivity to criticism, feelings of insecurity, and a contingent sense of self-worth that depends on external validation. Individuals high in narcissistic vulnerability often experience shame, anxiety, and social withdrawal when their self-image is threatened. Pincus & Lukowitsky (2010). Narcissistic vulnerability is defined as a self-regulatory difficulty where individuals struggle with low self-esteem, negative affect, and a fragile sense of self, leading to avoidance, distress, and emotional dysregulation in response to perceived failure or rejection Cain, Pincus, & Ansell (2008)

Objectives:

- To assess adult attachment style among teachers
- To assess narcissistic vulnerability among teachers
- To assess the relationship between adult attachment style and narcissistic vulnerability among teachers.

Hypothesis:

H0: There is no significant relationship between adult attachment style and narcissistic vulnerability.

Research design:

The correlational analysis is adopted for this study to find the relationship between Adult attachment style and Narcissistic vulnerability among teachers. The Adult attachment style is the independent variable and Narcissistic vulnerability is the dependent variable.

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Sample technique:

- Sample size – 200
- Sampling technique – Purposive sampling technique

Tool used:

- Adult attachment style: Adult attachment scale (AAS), Nancy. L. Collins., Stephen. J. Read (1990).
- Narcissistic vulnerability: Hypersensitive narcissism scale (HSNS), Hendin and Cheek (1997).

Tool description

- **The Adult Attachment Scale (AAS):** It is a psychological tool designed to assess an individual's attachment style in adulthood. It typically evaluates how a person relates to others in close relationships, such as romantic partners, family, and friends. The scale measures attachment patterns across three dimensions: anxiety, avoidance, and dependence. The scale consists of 18 items- with five alternatives – very characteristic of me-characteristic of me- neutral-not characteristic of me- not at all characteristic of me. The score of 18 is the minimum possible score and the score of 90 is the maximum. The scores of the three dimensions is compared and the dimension in which the highest score has obtained is taken into account.
- **Hyper sensitive narcissism scale (HSNS):** It is a psychological assessment tool designed to measure traits associated with hypersensitive narcissism. This scale specifically focuses on the self-centred, vulnerable aspects of narcissism, which differ from the more grandiose, overt traits typically associated with narcissism. The scale consists of 10 items with five alternatives. The minimum score is 10 and maximum is 50. The score 10 to 19 is low 20 to 34 is moderate and 35 to 50 is high vulnerable to narcissism.

Statistical analysis:

The statistics used for this study is the Pearson correlation. The Pearson correlation coefficient is a measure of linear correlation between two sets of data. It is used to find the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution, whether there is presence of positive correlation, negative correlation or no correlation

Inclusion criteria:

- I have selected teachers school teachers and college professors.

Exclusion criteria:

- I have excluded who are not teachers.
- Tuition teachers and other skill trainers are not selected

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RESULTS

Table :1 Descriptive Statistics

	N	Min	Max	Mean	S.D
Narcissistic vulnerability	200	10.00	50.00	29.7650	6.57693
Close	200	12.00	30.00	19.6650	3.52204
Depend	200	11.00	30.00	19.4850	3.74028
Anxiety	200	12.00	30.00	19.8100	3.40468

The above table shows a statistical analysis of Adult attachment style and Narcissistic vulnerability among teachers. The table shows the descriptive information such as the number of teachers (200), mean scores, standard deviation. The mean for Narcissistic vulnerability is 29.76 and the mean for dimensions of Adult attachment style which are close, depend, anxiety are 19.66, 19.48, 19.81 respectively.

TABLE:2 CORRELATION

Table :2.1 Close and Narcissistic Vulnerability

		Narcissistic vulnerability	Close
NV	Pearson correlation	1	-.037
	Sig(2-tailed)		.603
	N	200	200
Close	Pearson correlation	-.037	1
	Sig(2-tailed)	.603	
	N	200	200

The above table shows the correlation between close and narcissistic vulnerability. The r value is -.037 which is negative value that indicates that the relationship between dimension close of the adult attachment style and narcissistic vulnerability is insignificant. The result shows that the close and narcissistic vulnerability is not correlated. The negative value indicates that there is no relationship between the variables.

Table: 2.2 Depend and Narcissistic Vulnerability

		Narcissistic vulnerability	Depend
NV	Pearson correlation	1	-.031
	Sig(2-tailed)		.664
	N	200	200
Depend	Pearson correlation	-.031	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	.664	
	N	200	200

The above table shows the correlation between depend and narcissistic vulnerability. The r value is -.031 which is negative value that indicates that the relationship between dimension depend of the adult attachment style and narcissistic vulnerability is insignificant. The result shows that the depend and narcissistic vulnerability is not correlated. The negative value indicates that there is no relationship between the variables.

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Table :2.3 Anxiety and Narcissistic Vulnerability

		Narcissistic vulnerability	Anxiety
NV	Pearson correlation	1	.111
	Sig(2-tailed)		.118
	N	200	200
Anxiety	Pearson correlation	.111	1
	Sig(2-tailed)	.118	
	N	200	200

The above table shows the correlation between anxiety and narcissistic vulnerability. The r value is 0.111 which is value near zero that indicates that the relationship between dimension anxiety of the adult attachment style and narcissistic vulnerability is insignificant. The result shows that the anxiety and narcissistic vulnerability has very weak correlation. The value near zero indicates that there is a very weak relationship between the variables.

DISCUSSION

This study looked at the connection between narcissistic vulnerability and adult attachment styles, as determined by the closeness, dependency, and anxiety aspects. According to the study’s findings, narcissistic vulnerability and adult attachment style are not significantly correlated. There is no discernible link between adult attachment patterns and instructors’ narcissistic vulnerability, according to the results, which point to weak to negative correlations between these factors. The study discovered a negative relationship between instructors’ narcissistic vulnerability and closeness—the capacity to build strong, emotional relationships with others. This implies that narcissistic vulnerability is generally lower in people who are more at ease with emotional closeness. High closeness people most typically have secure attachment styles, which are defined by their ease in establishing and preserving intimate bonds. Additionally, the study discovered a negative relationship between instructors’ narcissistic vulnerability and dependence—the degree to which people rely on others for emotional support and reassurance. Dependent people often go to others for solace and trust, which may protect them from narcissistic weakness. Anxiety in attachment relationships does not appear to be a substantial predictor of narcissistic vulnerability, as seen by the poor correlation between narcissistic vulnerability and attachment anxiety (fear of abandonment and excessive desire for reassurance). Fear of rejection, increased emotional sensitivity, and reliance on other people for self-worth are traits of attachment anxiety. In previous studies there is only limited study on the adult attachment style and narcissistic vulnerability among teachers. In the study which was conducted by(Kathy Smolewska and Kenneth Dion) on relationship between adult attachment and narcissistic vulnerability has resulted in less consistent relationship between the variables. Some studies suggest that avoidant attachment may relate to certain narcissistic traits, while others find no significant association between variables.

Summary

This study investigates the relationship between adult attachment style and narcissistic vulnerability among teachers. The findings shows that statistical analysis is used to evaluate the relationship between adult attachment style and narcissistic vulnerability Among teachers. A sample of 200 teachers were examined. The descriptive statistics showed that the mean value of narcissistic vulnerability is 29.76 and mean value of dimensions of adult attachment style are close 19.66, depend 19.48, anxiety 19.81. To Assess statistical

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significance, the correlational study of Pearson correlation is used. The r value is -.037 for close, which is negative value that indicates that the relationship between dimension close of the adult attachment style and narcissistic vulnerability is insignificant. The r value is -.031 for depend which is negative value that indicates that the relationship between dimension depend of the adult attachment style and narcissistic vulnerability is insignificant. The r value is 0.111 for anxiety which is value near zero that indicates that the relationship between dimension anxiety of the adult attachment style and narcissistic vulnerability is insignificant. The overall result shows insignificant relationship between the variables. The results shows that there is no significant relationship between adult attachment style and narcissistic vulnerability among teachers. Further study with a bigger sample size and additional assessments is needed to corroborate these findings.

CONCLUSION

- 1. No correlation between adult attachment style and narcissistic vulnerability:** The study's findings indicate that there is no significant relationship between adult attachment style and narcissistic vulnerability among teachers. The r value of the dimensions are -.037, -.031, 0.111 which is negative value and near zero which shows that there is no significant correlation.
- 2. Future research consideration:** Teaching is a high emotional profession. Future studies should look how certain workplace elements like job stress, classroom dynamics and organisational support associates between teachers adult attachment style and narcissistic vulnerability.

Limitations of the study

- 1. Limited sample:** The study used a narrow sample of 200 teachers which may not be representative of larger population. Differences in early experiences, parental attachment, romantic relationship may alter the result limiting the findings application to other population.
- 2. Potential impact of Other variable:** The study did not specifically account for parental styles, childhood trauma, cultural norms, major life events. These variables may have influenced the findings and should be included in future studies to ensure a more complete understanding.
- 3. Self report bias:** The study on attachment style and narcissistic vulnerability mostly rely on self report questionnaire which may result in bias. Teachers may show themselves in a more favourable way. Responses can be influenced by self awareness.

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Acknowledgment

The author is sincerely grateful to the founder Thiru. A.C. SHANMUGAM and President Dr. A.C.S. ARUN KUMAR, of Dr. MGR university and also thank the provost Dr. G. GOPALAKRISHNAN, Vice chancellor Dr. S. GEETHALAKSHMI and Chancellor Padma Shri R.M. VASAGAM for helping with all the requirements for my graduation. And extend the gratitude to Registrar Dr.C. B.PALANIVELU, Additional Registrar and Joint Registrar Prof.M. PRABU and also the Dean Dr. A.R. ARUNACHALAM (ACADEMIC) and Dean Dr. K. SENTHILKUMAR (ADMINISTRATION), for the constant support. And also thank my Head of the Department and my guide Prof.R. MANOJ for the motivation and encouragement and thank the mentor Mrs. ABIDA. K for the guidance and supervision for the research paper completion. And also, thanks to the teaching and non-teaching staffs of department of psychology and faculty of HMCT and De novo courses. Heartfelt thanks to the family and friends, and also to everyone who participated in the research, for the support and encouragement and rendered the assistance in this research directly or indirectly without whom the project might have been impossible.

Declaration

No funding was obtained for this research. Primary data was collected by the first author and was analysed for this research.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that no conflicts of interests with respect to this research.

How to cite this article: Maryam, M, Manoj, R., & Abida K. (2025). A Correlational Study on Relationship Between Adult Attachment Style and Narcissistic Vulnerability Among Teachers. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 13(2), 1031-1040. DIP:18.01.090.20251302, DOI:10.25215/1302.090