

Research Paper

The Impact of Attachment Styles on Dependent Personality Traits and Substance Dependence (Smoking and Alcoholism) Among University Students: A Cross-Sectional Study

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence and early adulthood is a very sensitive period for individuals going through it, especially evident in collectivistic societies like India. This period of life is full of new experiences like going to universities, looking for jobs and forming relationships with people around. Students in this period start building identity and forming personalities of their own in society, which often leads to maladaptive coping mechanisms like smoking and drinking. This study explores the impact of adult attachment styles- secure, anxious, and avoidant on dependent personality traits and substance dependence (smoking and alcoholism) among university students. Using a mixed-methods research design, the study integrates quantitative data collected from 300 participants through standardized psychometric tools with qualitative insights derived from semi-structured interviews from 15 participants. The quantitative findings revealed that higher levels of anxious and avoidant attachment were significantly linked with higher levels of dependent personality traits and substance dependence. In contrast, secure attachment emerged as a protective factor, negatively correlated with dependency traits and substance dependence. Regression analyses further indicated that attachment-related anxiety and avoidance significantly predicted substance dependence, highlighting the psychological underpinnings of these behaviors. Qualitative thematic analysis enriched these findings by highlighting lived experiences behind the numbers. Themes such as fear of abandonment, emotional dysregulation, detachment, and the use of substances as coping mechanisms emerged prominently. Participants with insecure attachment styles described feeling emotionally overwhelmed or disconnected, often turning to alcohol or nicotine as a means of coping with internal and relational stressors. This study underscores the importance of attachment theory in understanding personality development and behavioral health in emerging adults. The findings strongly support the integration of attachment-informed frameworks within university campus mental health services, emphasizing early intervention and emotional skill-building to lower the risk of dependency related disorders. In doing so, this research contributes to a growing body of literature aiming to humanize psychological distress by tracing it back to the quality of human relationships and emotional bonds.

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Adolescence and early adulthood is a very sensitive period for individuals going through it, especially evident in collectivistic societies like India. This period of life is full of new experiences like going to universities, looking for jobs and forming relationships with people around. Students in this period start building identity and forming personalities of their own in society, which often leads to maladaptive coping mechanisms like smoking and drinking. Psychological research suggests that the answer to this lies in early attachment experiences. The way individuals form emotional relationships in their childhood has a lasting impact on their adulthood relationship, coping mechanisms and ability to regulate emotions and seek support (Bowlby, 1969; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Insecure attachment styles in adulthood, especially avoidant and anxious, have been associated with maladaptive coping mechanisms, including substance dependence (Thorberg & Lyvers, 2010). Additionally, dependent personality traits are not seen as negative traits until and unless it is affecting a person's emotional stability which often contributes to a person turning to substance dependence as a way to cope with the stress of being overly dependent upon others which is not reciprocated (Bornstein, 2012).

Substance dependence, especially alcohol consumption and smoking, is a growing concern among university students. The transition to university life often comes with endless challenges like academic pressure, emotional independence and social adaptation which can drive students with insecure attachment styles and dependent traits toward harmful coping strategies (Schulenberg & Maggs, 2002). Students with avoidant attachment style may rely on substance dependence as a way of suppressing their emotions or/and escaping from their problems, while anxiously attached students may use substances to ease their fear of rejection or/and social anxiety (Kassel et al., 2007).

There are numerous studies on attachment styles, dependent personality traits and substance dependence connections but there is little to no research on the combined influence of all three factors on university students. This paper aims to fill that gap by examining the impact of attachment styles on dependent personality traits and substance dependence (alcoholism and smoking) among university students through a cross sectional mixed methods approach. By incorporating both quantitative measures (psychological scales) and qualitative insights (personal experiences), this research presents in-depth analysis of these psychological dynamics. The findings will have significant relevance for mental health interventions tailored especially for young adults.

Background of the Study

Attachment Theory and Psychological Development

Attachment theory, originally developed by Bowlby (1969), provides basic understanding of how early relationships influence and shape an individual's emotional capacity, cognitive and behavioural development throughout life. This theory talks about how infants develop an internal working model of relationships based on their interaction with their caregivers. These early interactions impact how individuals form relationships in their adulthood and how they cope with stress in their life (Bretherton, 1992).

Building on Bowlby's work, Ainsworth et al. (1978) added three primary attachment styles: secure, anxious and avoidant. Securely attached individuals are able to form healthy

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relationships with others as they have positive self-perception and expectations of others. They are able to deal with stress more maturely and seek support from others when required. Anxiously attached individuals often show heightened sensitivity to rejection and have difficulty maintaining relationships because of emotional distress and dependency. Avoidantly attached individuals, on the other hand, exhibit discomfort with emotional connection with others and often suppress attachment needs, they prefer self reliance over it to avoid vulnerability and emotional traumas. Later developments in attachment research broaden the classification to a four category model, incorporating fearful-avoidant and dismissive-avoidant attachment styles, both of which are characterised by difficulties in maintaining and forming secure relationships with others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

Attachment Styles and Dependent Personality Traits

Personality development is a lifelong process, it starts from birth when we are slowly introduced to the real world and people around. Attachment theory points out evidently how our personality in adulthood is a result of our interactions with caregivers in our childhood. Dependent Personality traits are basically dependence on others for decision making and emotional support, fear of losing close ones, need of validation, etcetera. These traits are manageable and are not negatively seen until and unless it becomes pervasive in nature meaning that a person feels difficult to make independent decisions, have excessive fear of abandonment, psychological dependence on others and often choose maladaptive coping mechanisms in case of distress (Bornstein, 2012).

The link between attachment styles and dependent personality traits can be explained through multiple psychological mechanisms. Individuals with anxious attachment style demonstrate a strong fear of abandonment, highly sensitive to rejection and excessive reliance on others for validation and support (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). These traits strongly match with dependent personality traits such as high need for validation, difficulty making independent decisions, fear of rejection from others, and intense need for external support (Zuroff et al., 2016). On the other hand, individuals with avoidant attachment style may internalize distress and suppress their dependency needs because they find relationships emotionally draining and difficult to maintain for long as they would prefer escaping from difficult situations instead of facing it (Luyten & Blatt, 2013). These issues like excessive dependence, fear of abandonment, high sensitivity to rejection, suppression of needs, internalization of distress, etcetera often leads to external coping strategies such as substance abuse (Schindler, 2019).

University Students and Substance Dependence

Substances like cigarettes and alcohol are easily available around the world and are also legal to consume after a certain age mentioned by different state laws in India. Usually, the legal age of smoking is 18+ and 21-25 for alcohol consumption, this makes university students a perfect beginner consumers who are not aware of addiction and dependence these substances create. We human beings are naturally attracted to pleasure seeking stimulus and these substances affect certain nerves and hormones leading to pleasure feeling and provides a way to escape from reality for some minutes to hours (Schulenberg & Maggs, 2002).

University students are young adults who go through a critical period of transition from childhood to adolescence and early adulthood marked by social challenges, academic pressures, and identity formation, emotional instability, making this population particularly vulnerable to indulge in maladaptive coping mechanisms such as substance use (Kuntsche et

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al., 2005). Several other factors also contribute to substance dependence among university students, including socialization, peer pressure and peer influence, etcetera (Hammen et al., 2010).

The Link Between Attachment Styles and Substance Dependence

The relationship between attachment styles and substance dependence is evidently proven. Individuals with insecure attachment styles like avoidant and anxious attachment tendencies, have shown higher dependence on substances as compared to individuals with secure attachment style (Thorberg & Lyvers, 2010). Insecurely attached individuals often face difficulty with emotion regulation, making them more likely to depend on external substances to alleviate distress (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Those with avoidant attachment styles may experience discomfort with intimacy, suppression of emotional needs, leading them to use smoking or alcohol as a way of escaping or numbing their psychological distress (Zuroff et al., 2016). Anxiously attached individuals, who go through chronic self-doubt and rejection sensitivity, may turn to substance use as a means to enhance social confidence or mitigate feelings of inadequacy (Schindler, 2019).

Dependent Personality Traits and Substance Dependence

Individuals with high levels of dependent personality traits often get fascinated by substances as they serve a way of facilitating interactions with others and seek social approval (Bornstein, 2012). Moreover, individuals with dependent personality traits tend to have poor stress management, making them more vulnerable to addiction as a way of escaping from emotional discomfort (Luyten & Blatt, 2013). Given their strong dependence on external validation, they are more susceptible to peer pressure and social norms that encourage drinking and smoking (Zuroff et al., 2016).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Attachment Theory and Adult Attachment Styles

Attachment theory, originally given by Bowlby (1969), put forward that an individual's adulthood is highly influenced by his/her early relationships with caregivers. It affects an individual's foundation of social and emotional functioning in adulthood (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Attachment styles can be categorised into three primary attachment styles- secure, anxious and avoidant- each have distinct patterns of emotional regulation and behaviours (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Fraley & Shaver, 2000)

Secure attachment is characterized by positive self and others perception and a healthy approach to relationships, leading to high self-concept, self-esteem and self-worth (Hazel & Shaver, 1987; Collins & Feeney, 2004). People who are securely attached use effective coping mechanisms and take support from others when required. In contrast, individuals with anxious attachment styles are often sensitive to rejection, fear of abandonment and are emotionally dependent on others for making decisions and getting validation (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002; Cassidy & Shaver, 2016). Individuals with an avoidantly attached style tend to avoid emotionally demanding situations because of this, they find it difficult to maintain relationships with others. They are also prone to suppress their emotional and dependency needs. People with insecure attachment styles- anxious and avoidant attachment individuals are highly vulnerable to external influences and are more prone to use maladaptive ways of coping with distress (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Simpson & Rholes, 2017).

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Recent studies have explained the neurobiological causes of attachment styles, suggesting that levels of vasopressin and oxytocin systems affect attachment behaviours (Bakermans-Kranenburg & Van Ijzendoorn, 2013; Feldman, 2017). Securely attached individuals tend to have higher levels of oxytocin, resulting in social bonding and trust. On the other hand, insecurely attached individuals show heightened stress level and maladaptive coping behaviours linked to dysregulation in hypothalamic- pituitary- adrenal (HPA) axis (Diamond & Fagundes, 2010; Laurent & Powers, 2007). In addition to this, neuroimaging studies have shown that people with insecure attachment styles exhibit disturbed activity in the prefrontal cortex regions linked with emotional regulation and amygdala (Vrticka & Vuilleumier, 2012).

Dependent Personality Traits and Attachment Styles

Dependent Personality traits involve excessive dependency or/and reliance on others for emotional support and decision making. People with these traits tend to compromise their own personal autonomy for others' validation, because of this they have low to no self-confidence (Cassin & Von Ranson, 2005; Hammen et al., 2010). They find it difficult to function independently and often rely on others for help. For them, rejection or/and criticism from close ones is difficult to take in. Many researchers evidently argued through their studies that dependent personality traits are strongly linked to early attachment experiences especially people with insecure attachment style. This is because early attachment styles are proven to be linked with one's interpersonal behaviour and emotional coping strategies in adulthood.

The Link Between Anxious Attachment and Dependency

A visible connection pointed out in many research articles between dependent personality traits and anxious attachment style (Bornstein, 2012; Zuroff et al., 2016). Individuals with an anxious attachment style are seen to fear rejection, struggle with self- sufficiency, seek constant validation, making them more prone to vulnerability and over dependence on family, partners and friends (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). Their emotional strength is deeply tied to external sources of support and because of which they may have difficulty dealing with life's challenges alone (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2002).

Psychological studies pin out that this dependency is a result of early caregiving experiences. A qualitative research conducted by Cassidy & Shaver (2016) reveals that children raised in unpredictable or inconsistent environments, where parents' responsiveness and affection fluctuate, may develop high vigilance towards relationships, constantly seeking external validation to compensate for unmet emotional needs. Over time, this pattern may turn into dependent personality disorder in extreme cases as observed by Skodol et al. (2005), in their longitudinal study on children who suffered from insecure attachment style portrayed higher chances of developing dependent personality disorder.

From a neurological perspective, a study was conducted by Vrticka & Vuilleumier (2012) to understand functioning of brain parts in individuals with anxious attachment style. Results showed that individuals with anxious attachment display increased activity in the amygdala, a brain region which controls emotional processing and fear responses. This heightened reactivity makes them more vulnerable to perceived abandonment or rejection, reinforcing their need for constant validation from others (Laurent & Powers, 2007).

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Avoidant Attachment and Its Hidden Dependency Needs

While individuals with avoidant attachment style are commonly associated with self-reliant, independent, emotional detachment, research suggests that these people have high need for dependency though they do not explicitly portray that trait to everyone (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Cain et al., 2015). These individuals may struggle with an internal conflict but on the surface, they may present themselves as self-sufficient individuals.

A specific subcategory of avoidantly attached individuals, known as fearful-avoidant, experiences high trust issues. Because of this, they try to avoid deep emotional bonds to protect themselves from vulnerability, yet still crave validation from others and social connection. This paradox often results in covert dependency behaviours, such as seeking approval from others through substance use, self-sabotaging relationships and so on (Crittenden et al., 2014; Luecken et al., 2017). Studies indicate that these individuals, despite portraying their personality and outlook as independent, experience higher rates of emotional distress, depressive symptoms and loneliness (Schindler, 2019).

The Influence of Stress and Mental Health on Substance Use

Research consistently shows that stress plays a major role in people's engagement with substance use (Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009). Studies suggest that day to day life stresses, modern life demands, work overload, disturbed lifestyle are contributors to attraction towards alcohol or nicotine as a way to self-medicate and temporarily relieve anxiety (Pedrelli et al., 2015).

Furthermore, individuals facing mental health challenges, including anxiety and depression are at higher risk of substance abuse as a maladaptive coping strategy (Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009). Research suggests that those with high levels of psychological distress are more prone to excessive alcohol consumption, daily smoking and substance experimentation compared to individuals with better mental health resilience and social support (Pedrelli et al., 2015).

Attachment Insecurity and Its Role in Substance Dependence

Research indicates that people who are insecurely attached are more prone to substance dependence. Individuals with avoidant attachment styles often turn to substances as a way to suppress emotional feelings, escape from intimacy thoughts and maintain emotional distance to portray a totally different personality in front of others (Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Kassel et al., 2007). On the other hand, anxiously attached individuals may use substances as a means of alleviating emotional distress and seek comfort, particularly when experiencing fear of abandonment or interpersonal conflicts (De Rick et al., 2009; Thorberg & Lyvers, 2010).

Studies also highlight the connection between early attachment disruptions with regulation of dopaminergic pathways, which are responsible for impulse control and reward processing. This can cause severe psychological distress leading to seeking pleasure from external sources like substance abuse (Luecken et al., 2017).

Addressing the Research Gap

There is extensive research on attachment theory, dependent personality traits and substance dependence, but relatively little to no research has explored the combined relation between these variables specifically within university students population. Additionally, young

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adulthood as observed and suggested by many studies is a crucial developmental period where attachment behaviours and coping mechanisms are noticeable and significantly affect their lives, it is important to investigate how these factors interact and influence students' psychological well being and behavioural patterns. As mentioned above, existing research has largely focused on the variables separately, yet there remains a gap in understanding how these variables interact in shaping risk behaviours among university students which if intervened in an early stage can make their future better.

This study aims to address this research gap by employing a mixed methods approach that integrates both qualitative and quantitative data to understand the complex interplay between attachment styles, dependent personality traits and substance dependence. The findings will contribute to both practical applications and theoretical understanding in psychology. Theoretically, the study will inform about how attachment insecurity influences dependency traits and substance use behaviours. Practically, the study aims to provide clinical interventions and university mental health programs focusing on identifying and supporting students at risk of developing maladaptive coping mechanisms. Additionally, insights from this research could contribute to the development of targeted psychological interventions that address underlying attachment insecurities and promote healthier coping mechanisms.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are tested:

- **H1:** Higher levels of anxious attachment will be positively correlated with increased dependent personality traits among university students.
- **H2:** Higher levels of avoidant attachment will be positively correlated with increased dependent personality traits among university students.
- **H3:** Students scoring high on anxious and avoidant attachment will report increased intake of alcohol use compared to those with secured attachment styles.
- **H4:** Students scoring high on anxious and avoidant attachment will report increased consumption of nicotine compared to those with secured attachment styles.
- **H5:** Students scoring high on secure attachment style will report significantly lower dependent personality traits and substance dependence compared to students with insecure attachment styles.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study examines the influence of adult attachment styles on dependent personality traits and substance dependence (alcoholism and smoking) among university students by adopting a cross-sectional, mixed methods research design, specifically an explanatory sequential design. This design involves the data collection and analysis of quantitative data, followed by qualitative data collection and analysis to further elaborate and support quantitative findings. The rationale for using this approach is to provide a more in depth understanding of how attachment styles relate to dependent personality traits and substance use behaviours in a university context.

The quantitative approach allows testing specific hypotheses using standardised psychometric tools and statistical analysis. The qualitative approach on the other hand deepens the interpretation of quantitative results by exploring participants' experiences with

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attachment, coping strategies, emotional regulation and substance use motivators. This interplay of methods enhances both the depth and breadth of the study's insights.

Variables

This paper includes the following key variables:

Independent variables

Attachment style measured along three dimensions-

1. Anxious Attachment Style
2. Avoidant Attachment Style
3. Secure Attachment Style

Dependent Variables

- Dependent Personality Traits
- Alcohol Use
- Nicotine Dependence

Participants and Sampling Method

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to select participants from various university campuses, ensuring proportional representation across gender, academic level (postgraduate/undergraduate).

Inclusion Criteria

- Age range between 18-25
- Enrolled in a recognized postgraduate or undergraduate university degree.
- Provision of informed consent and willingness to participate in both qualitative and quantitative phases.

Exclusion Criteria

- Currently undergoing treatment for substance abuse disorders.
- Diagnosed history of severe psychiatric disorders that may confound the variables in the study.

A total of 300 participants were selected for the quantitative phase which ensured sufficient power for statistical analysis. On the other hand, a purposive subsample of 15 participants were selected for the qualitative phase based on variability in attachment style and substance use patterns identified in the quantitative analysis.

Description of the Tools

Quantitative Tools

- Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS) (Collins & Read, 1990): 18-item scale measuring two dimensions—attachment-related anxiety and avoidance.
- Dependent Personality Inventory (DPI) (Pincus & Wilson, 2001): Evaluates dependency traits including interpersonal submissiveness, need for approval, and fear of abandonment.
- Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) (Saunders et al., 1993): Assesses hazardous and harmful alcohol use behaviors.

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- Fagerström Test for Nicotine Dependence (FTND) (Heatherton et al., 1991): Evaluates intensity of physical addiction to nicotine.

Qualitative Tool

- To support the quantitative findings, semi-structured interviews explored the following dimensions:
- Participants' early attachment experiences and their perceived influence on emotional well-being.
- Coping strategies and relational dynamics in stressful or dependent situations.
- Social, emotional, and contextual triggers for alcohol and nicotine use.
- Interview questions were designed based on patterns observed in the quantitative data and existing literature on attachment theory and substance use. All qualitative data were transcribed and anonymized for further thematic analysis.

Procedure

Data collection was conducted in two sequential phases:

Quantitative Phase

Participants were approached through university mailing lists, classroom announcements, and student forums. Informed consent was obtained digitally or in writing before participation.

Standardized psychometric tools were administered either online through secure platforms (e.g., Google Forms) or in supervised classroom sessions. After data collection, statistical analysis was performed using SPSS. Techniques include descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlations, multiple regression analysis. Further, analysis was correlated with the hypotheses and discussion was written.

Qualitative Phase

Based on quantitative results, participants were selected and approached for interviews. Semi-structured interview questions were developed based on key findings from the quantitative phase. Interviews were conducted in quiet, private settings or via encrypted video calls. Each session lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was audio-recorded with consent. After the interviews were completed, they were further transcribed and analysed through thematic analysis.

Ethical Considerations

With respect to British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics (2014), the study ensured:

- Informed consent was taken from all the participants. It is mentioned as the first step in questionnaire answering forms, participants were informed briefly about the study mentioned in the description of the questionnaire in the form itself and then asked to select yes or no for consent depending on their free will. For qualitative data, participants were asked for consent verbally at the beginning of the interview after explaining briefly about the study.
- Confidentiality was maintained throughout the data handling. Participants' names were replaced by numbers in the datasheet for anonymity in quantitative data and recordings of interviews were deleted after analysis.

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Right to withdraw was respected at all stages.

Psychological support was provided through providing them with referrals of psychologists as some topics discussed in the study might trigger bad memories from the past especially during interview questioning.

RESULTS

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics (N=300)

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Secure Attachment	28.16	4.56	12	38
Anxious Attachment	33.01	5.98	15	45
Avoidant Attachment	30.90	6.03	14	44
DPI Score	48.60	7.98	20	70
AUDIT Score	16.54	8.02	0	40
FTND Score	5.13	2.40	0	10

Descriptive statistics were conducted to understand the patterns of attachment styles, dependent personality traits, alcohol and nicotine dependence among university students (N = 300). As shown in Table 1, students demonstrated moderate levels of both anxious (M = 33.01, SD = 5.98) and avoidant (M = 30.90, SD = 6.03) attachment, while the average score for secure attachment was relatively lower (M = 28.16, SD = 4.56), suggesting a higher prevalence of insecure attachment styles in this sample. Dependent personality traits, measured by the DPI, had a mean score of 48.60 (SD = 7.98), indicating moderate levels of dependency. With respect to substance use, participants reported moderate levels of alcohol consumption (AUDIT: M = 16.54, SD = 8.02) and nicotine dependence (FTND: M = 5.13, SD = 2.40).

Table 2 Pearson Correlation Matrix

	Anxious Attachment	Avoidant Attachment	DPI Score
Anxious Attachment	1	.41	.54
Avoidant Attachment	.43	1	.46
DPI Score	.54	.48	1

Note: $p < .01$ (2-tailed)

The results of Pearson correlation analysis as shown in Table 2 revealed significant positive relationships between insecure attachment styles (anxious and avoidant) and dependent personality traits. Specifically, anxious attachment was moderately and positively correlated with DPI scores ($r = .54$, $p < .01$), while avoidant attachment was also positively correlated with DPI scores ($r = .48$, $p < .01$). Additionally, anxious and avoidant attachment were positively correlated with one another ($r = .41$, $p < .01$), suggesting that these insecure dimensions may co-exist in individuals.

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Table 3 Multiple Regression Predicting Dependent Personality Traits

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	Sig.
Constant	12.25	3.60	-	4.56	.000
Anxious Attachment	0.76	0.12	.45	8.65	.000
Avoidant Attachment	0.54	0.09	.40	7.50	.000

To further understand the predictive influence of attachment styles on dependent personality traits, a multiple regression analysis was conducted as shown in Table 3. The model was statistically significant ($R^2 = .49$, $F(2, 297) = 83.4$, $p < .001$), indicating that attachment-related anxiety and avoidance collectively explained 49% of the variance in dependent personality traits.

Table 4 Group Means by Attachment Category

Attachment Category	N	DPI Mean	AUDIT Mean	FTND Mean
Secure	107	32.82	6.41	2.12
Insecure	163	55.36	19.69	8.09
Mixed	30	47.87	15.25	4.13

Group mean comparisons as shown in Table 4 further illustrate how attachment categories relate to dependent traits and substance use behaviors. Students categorized as securely attached had significantly lower mean scores on the DPI, AUDIT, and FTND compared to those classified as insecure (anxious or avoidant), supporting hypotheses H3, H4, and H5.

Table 5 Thematic Analysis of Attachment Styles, Dependency Traits, and Substance Use Among University Students

Theme	Subtheme	Verbatim
Insecure Attachment and Emotional Vulnerability	Fear of Rejection and Abandonment	<p>“I didn’t get love from my family, so my friends are my family and of course I have fear of losing them”</p> <p>“I like to discuss things with my partner before taking a decision as he might reject it later and that will create a lot of fight”</p>
	Emotional Overdependence	<p>“Hhmm..that’s true I rely on him alot for everything” “Sometimes i feel that my mood swings are based on people’s mood around me”</p> <p>“Yeah, I look for my friends validation on things i am planning to do”</p>
	Avoidance masked as Independence	<p>“People see me as independent women, but deep inside I too need support, I think every human basic need is relation” “My parents think I am very independent but they don’t know the reason behind it, it’s them. They were never available for me”</p>

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Theme	Subtheme	Verbatim
Coping Mechanism for Dependency and Stress	Substance Use as Emotional Escape Maladaptive vs Adaptive Coping	“Cigarette breaks are the best, they help me manage my emotions, otherwise i would burst into tears” “Alcohol in our age is not for fun, it is cheap therapy for us!” “Yeah, I face issues but i talk to my father, he is my support” “Nobody listens to your emotional shit, so you need to get control over yourself and if that’s through smoking or drinking, i think it is fine”
Social Influence and Internal Conflict	Peer Pressure and Belonging Needs Shame, Guilt, and Identity Struggles	“I didn’t like drinking at first, I mean who liked it at first go? But my friends were the ones who made me try it and i just couldn’t say no to them” “My friends are the main culprit, they literally taught me step by step how to smoke in 11th class, can you believe it?” “Alcohol is my friend, when I struggle in my life, i go back home, have a beer and sleep” “I act independent in front of everyone but to be honest I smoke before my vivas and tests to feel at ease”

DISCUSSION

This section provides insights from the findings of qualitative and quantitative data analysis of the study which investigated the impact of attachment styles on dependent personality traits and substance dependence (alcoholism and smoking) among university students. The integration of psychometric assessments and thematic analysis provided a detailed understanding of how attachment styles influence an individual's coping mechanisms and emotional vulnerabilities in the early adulthood period of life.

Overview of Findings

The results revealed that avoidant and anxious attachment styles are positively linked with dependent personality traits and substance dependence (alcohol and nicotine). On the other hand, secure attachment style was negatively or non-significantly associated with these outcomes, suggesting a lower dependence on maladaptive coping strategies and dependent personality traits. These patterns were also validated by participants’ narratives in the qualitative phase, where those with secure attachment style demonstrated healthier interpersonal strategies and resilience in stressful situations. In contrast, people with insecure attachment styles described a range of emotional struggles and over-dependence on others for comfort and stability.

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Insecure Attachment and Dependence Personality Traits

The first and second hypotheses predicting positive relationships between avoidant and anxious attachment styles and dependent personality traits were strongly supported by results. According to quantitative analysis, anxious attachment was moderately and positively correlated with DPI scores ($r = .54, p < .01$), while avoidant attachment was also positively correlated with DPI scores ($r = .48, p < .01$). These findings suggest that people with anxious attachment style experience a high level of fear of abandonment and rejection and on the other side people with avoidant attachment style experience discomfort with closeness and often escape from intense emotional situations may lead to internalizing relational insecurities which manifest as impaired autonomy and excessive dependency on others for validation and acceptance (Bornstein, 2011).

According to qualitative analysis, these statistical relationships are supported positively with qualitative experiences of university students. Anxiously attached participants frequently expressed difficulty in making independent decisions because of constant fear of failure and rejection due to low confidence and self esteem, they also expressed high need of emotional reassurance and fear of being alone. This is strongly supported by Bowlby's theory that individuals with anxious attachment styles often internalise inconsistent caregiving experiences which lead to hyper-activated attachment systems. One student remarked, "Yeah, I look for my friends' validation on things I am planning to do".

Students with avoidant attachment styles are less expressive about their need for dependency, talk more about underlying emotional detachment, loneliness and milder forms of psychological dependence masked by a facade of self - reliance. This duality highly correlates with research conducted by Mikulincer and Shaver (2007), where individuals suppress attachment needs to escape from intense emotions and perceived threats of intimacy. These insights underscore the interplay between emotional self reliance and latent dependency in avoidant individuals.

Attachment Styles and Substance Use

The third and fourth hypotheses predict that higher levels of insecure attachment styles-anxious and avoidant attachment would be linked with increased substance dependence (alcohol and nicotine). These were confirmed both statistically and thematically. Anxious and avoidant attachment is significantly correlated with AUDIT and FTND scores, suggesting that emotional dysfunction in these individuals may lead to substance use as a way of coping and affective self-medication.

According to qualitative analysis, this connection is highly supported. Students with anxious attachment styles mentioned that using substances help them to calm their nerves in social settings or to numb emotional pain during crisis. One participant stated, "Nobody listens to your emotional shit, so you need to get control over yourself and if that's through smoking or drinking, I think it is fine"

Similarly, participants with avoidant attachment style described substance use as a way of detaching from emotions. Their narratives often conveyed their preference for smoking or drinking to replace interpersonal support and reluctance to rely on others. This aligns with the characteristics of avoidant attachment style as reduced help-seeking behaviors and fostering emotional suppression (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002).

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Additionally, participants with secure attachment style showed markedly lower levels of nicotine and alcohol use especially in crisis, this reflects their enhanced emotional regulation skills and healthy reliance on their social support and coping strategies. This is supported by extensive literature on secure attachment styles pointing their resilience and protective factors against psychopathology (Sroufe et al., 2005; Allen & Miga, 2010)

Social and Psychological Triggers of Dependency

A major theme which emerged from qualitative data was the influence of internal psychological conflicts and social dynamics in triggering dependency behaviours. Academics stress, peer pressure, a desire for belonging and familial expectations were frequently mentioned as motivating factors for substance abuse. This was specifically pointed out by individuals who are anxiously attached, they often conflated social acceptance with self-worth.

From a psychological point of view, these behaviors can be understood through the lens of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), where the need for social connection, when unmet, may lead to compensatory behaviours. Participants with low perceived social connection and insecure attachments are often inclined towards external regulators such as nicotine and alcohol to fulfill these unmet needs.

Another emerging theme was the role of emotional inconsistency- students frequently reported fluctuations between emotional overwhelm and feelings of control. This was highly reported by participants with avoidant attachment style, they described oscillating between episodes of binge behaviour and stoicism, consistent with study findings by Fraley et al. (2011) regarding the instability of emotions among avoidantly attached individuals.

Implications for Psychological Interventions

The findings of this study can greatly help in forming university based mental health services. Early identification of students who are insecurely attached can enable them to make a provision of targeted interventions focused at reducing substance misuse and emotional dependency. Therapeutic approaches like attachment based therapy (Levy et al., 2006), emotionally focused therapy (Johnson, 2009) and mentalization based treatment (Fonagy & Bateman, 2006) may be specifically effective in promoting secure relational frameworks and restructuring maladaptive internal working models.

Additionally, psychoeducational programs aimed at relationship building, emotional regulation and healthy stress coping could benefit the large student population. Peer mentoring and group therapy when aligned with attachment theory, can help increase a sense of community, encourage secure attachments among peers and reduce isolation.

Limitations of the Study

While this research provides significant contributions, several limitations must be acknowledged. The use of self report instruments are highly susceptible to response biases.

The sample is restricted to university students, which can limit generalizability of results to a broader population of young adults. The qualitative sample, though rich in information, was limited in size and may not capture the experiences which can be representative of the students population.

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Additionally, variables like social support networks, gender identity, culture background, region, caste and class were not explicitly measured but if taken into consideration, might bring different analyses.

The cross-sectional design further limits the interpretation of people from birth to present to understand deeper interplay of variables taken into account in this study.

CONCLUSION

This paper explored the impact of adult attachment styles, specifically secure, avoidant and anxious, on dependent personality traits and substance dependence (alcoholism and smoking) among university students. Using a mixed methods approach, the paper combined quantitative data from standardized psychometric tools (RAAS, DPI, AUDIT, FTND) with rich qualitative data from semi-structured interviews. This approach helped to understand in depth about attachment styles' influence one's emotional vulnerability, behavioural outcomes and coping mechanism in a university setting.

The quantitative analysis revealed that insecure attachment styles- anxious and avoidant were significantly linked with higher levels of dependent personality traits and substance dependence. On the other hand, a secure attachment style appeared to serve as a protective factor. These statistical trends were supported by qualitative findings through themes such as emotional dysregulation, detachment, fear of abandonment and the use of substances as maladaptive coping strategies.

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Conflict of Interest

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