

Research Paper

A Comparative Study of Attachment Styles, Marital Adjustment and Marital Satisfaction among Males and Females

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ABSTRACT

Attachment Styles are known to have an impact on marital relationships but there are very few studies which talk about gender-based differences. The purpose of the study was to compare attachment styles, marital adjustment and marital satisfaction among married males and females. A total of 102 married individuals with more than 5 years of marriage and at least one child of which 51 working males and 51 non-working females were selected using purposive sampling. The scales like Measure of Attachment Style (MOAS) developed by Naseem Ahmad and colleagues, the Marital Adjustment Scale (MAS) created by Dr. C.G. Deshpande, and the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMS) developed by David Olson and associates (excluding distortion items) along with a personal data sheet was used. Shapiro-Wilk test of normality was used which indicated that the data was not normal. Thus, Mann-Whitney U Test was used for comparison. The results indicated significant gender differences in ambivalent and avoidant attachment style, in which females scored higher in ambivalent while males scored higher in avoidant attachment style. However, no significant gender differences were found for secure attachment style and marital adjustment and marital satisfaction. These results infer that gender might influence certain attachment style but not marital adjustment or marital satisfaction. This study contributes to the growing literature and emphasizes the value of considering tailored interventions which are gender specific to understand relational patterns in marital counselling which helps in promoting marital well-being.

Keywords: Attachment Styles, Marital Adjustment, Marital Satisfaction, Gender Differences, Comparative Study

Marital relationships are an enriching and progressive experience. Partners go through various positive experiences as well as challenges and difficulties throughout their marital life which affects their personality, emotional well-being and overall view of their life. Several factors influence the quality of marriage they share and even shape their relationship further impacting them individually.

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Attachment styles help in understanding how they relate to their partners. Secure attachment style enables the individual to foster trust and emotional intimacy among the couple. Whereas insecure attachment styles such as ambivalent and avoidant attachment style can lead to feelings of inefficacy, emotional exertion and can lead to difficulty in building trust in one another. These attachment styles can provoke difficulty in marriages further leading to poor marital adjustment and dissatisfaction among couples. The work done by Bowlby in his Attachment theory suggests that the foundation of relating to others i.e. attachment styles in adulthood is laid right from early interactions with caregivers. These styles are developed through various stages beginning from childhood to adolescence which can be understood by the adult attachment model given by Batholomew.

Additionally, marital adjustments also play a vital role for a successful marriage. Poor adjustment can lead to stress, miscommunications leading to lowered satisfaction, emotional closeness creating a vicious cycle of negative emotions impacting both the individuals in a relationship. Marital adjustment can be further looked upon with the help of theories like the Equity theory (Walster et al., 1978) which talks about the role of partners being fair to each other and Gottman's sound relationship house theory highlights commitment, trust and communication as factors towards high adjustment.

Marital satisfaction refers to the feeling of fulfillment individuals feel in their marriage. Lack of satisfaction can lead to frustration and dissatisfaction with the partner's role. Factors such as conflicts, negative interactions, emotional detachment and in extreme cases can lead to rift among the couples lowering marital satisfaction over time. Theories like Double ABC-X Model (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983) which talk about how couples who successfully manage stressors, adapt to resources and perceive challenges lead to greater satisfaction over the period of time. Dynamic Goal theory of marital satisfaction by (Li & Fung, 2011) suggests that when partners have shared goals for their marriage and their achievement towards it leads to higher marital satisfaction.

Okonkwo found that secure attachment fosters better communication and satisfaction, while anxious and avoidant styles increase conflict. In the studies by Slovak and Chinese studies using ECR-R Gender differences emerge consistently wherein women often show higher ambivalent attachment, and men show higher avoidance. Some studies by Ciocca et al., 2020; Çelikkaleli & Avcı, 2016 suggest that gender roles, rather than biological sex, may better predict attachment patterns suggesting that secure attachment style has no gender differences.

Studies on marital adjustment reveal how gender roles influence relationship quality. Faisal et al. (2025) found that couples who face similar external pressures and utilize similar coping strategies are more likely to experience favorable marital adjustment outcomes, regardless of their gender. Moreover, Jain (2024) emphasized that marital adjustment often depends on emotional maturity and the ability of partners to navigate conflicts together. Overall, occupational roles and societal expectations seem to impact how men and women adjust within marriage.

Meta-analyses by Jackson et al., 2014; Satici & Deniz, 2023 show minimal gender differences in marital satisfaction clinical samples and there are no differences in non-clinical sample. McCoy (1994) found that satisfaction levels may not differ significantly by gender.

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Importance of study

Studying attachment styles, marital adjustment, and marital satisfaction across gender is essential to understand how men and women experience, express, and navigate intimate relationships differently. Gender roles and socialization influence emotional regulation, communication, and coping strategies in relationships. Exploring these differences helps identify specific needs, challenges, and strengths unique to each gender. This knowledge is crucial for designing gender-sensitive marital counseling interventions, promoting mutual understanding, and enhancing relationship satisfaction. Additionally, it supports a more inclusive psychological framework that acknowledges diverse lived experiences rather than assuming uniform relational patterns across genders.

Objectives

1. To examine differences in gender in attachment styles among married individuals.
2. To examine differences in gender in marital adjustment among married individuals.
3. To examine differences in gender in marital satisfaction among married individuals.

Hypotheses

- H1: Males will score higher than females in avoidant attachment style.
- H2: Females will score higher than males in anxious attachment style.
- H3: Females will have higher marital adjustment than males.
- H0a: There will be no gender difference in secure attachment style.
- H0b: There will be no gender difference in marital satisfaction between males and females.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample for the research consisted of 102 married individuals aged between 35 and 50 years. A purposive sampling method was used to select participants based on characteristics relating to the research objectives. The sample included working males and females who are homemakers, married for more than 5 years and at least have one or more child.

Research Design

The design of the study was a comparative between group design.

Material

The Attachment style was assessed using the Measure of Attachment Style (MOAS) developed by Naseem Ahmad, Azmat Jahan, and Nasheed Imtiaz. This self-report inventory consists of 27 items, designed to measure three key dimensions of adult attachment: secure, insecure ambivalent, and insecure avoidant styles. The items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). A higher score on each dimension reflects a greater tendency toward that attachment style.

Marital adjustment was assessed using the Marital Adjustment Scale (MAS) developed by Dr. C.G. Deshpande, designed specifically for married individuals. The scale consists of 25 items, of which 15 items are rated statements measured on a 5-point Likert scale, and the remaining 10 items require respondents to check their level of agreement on a 5-point agreement–disagreement scale. Lower scores on this scale indicate higher adjustment.

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Marital satisfaction was assessed using the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMS) developed by David H. Olson and colleagues. In this study, the distortion items were excluded, resulting in a total of 10 items focusing on overall relationship satisfaction. The EMS uses a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), where a higher total score indicates greater marital satisfaction.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics such as mean, median, mode, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis, and their standard errors were computed to understand the data distribution. Additionally, histograms were plotted for each variable. To assess normality, the Shapiro-Wilk test was conducted, and the results indicated that the data did not meet the assumption of normal distribution. Based on this, non-parametric test, particularly the Mann-Whitney U Test, was used to compare the scores of male and female participants. All analyses were performed using SPSS version 30.

Procedure

The data collection was from 102 married individuals, including 51 males and 51 females, who met the required inclusion criteria. A purposive sampling method was used. Participants were approached through test scales and personal data sheet questionnaire.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1: Table showing comparison of secure attachment style between males and females using Mann-Whitney U Test

	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Secure Attachment	1	51	48.12	2454.00	1128.000	0.247
	2	51	54.88	2799.00		

The result table shows that the mean rank for males is 48.12, while for females, it is 54.88. The Mann-Whitney U value is 1128.000, with an asymptotic significance (2-tailed) value of 0.247. Since this p-value is greater than 0.05, it indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in secure attachment style between males and females.

The results can be supported with the help of attachment theory given by Bowlby which states that secure attachment is shaped by consistency, responsiveness and emotional availability of caregivers during early development. The primary bases of one's attachment style are relational experienced and not biological sex. As males and females can form secure bonds when they are raised in emotionally supportive environments, the theory itself states that gender cannot be a major predictor of attachment security. The results can also be supported with the help of previous studies where in one of the studies conducted by Celikkaleli and Avci (2016), no significant gender differences were found in university students, instead they emphasized gender roles over biological roles in formation of attachment behaviour. Ciocca et al. (2020) in his study found that secure attachment predicted both masculine and feminine traits irrespective of biological sex. Moreover, the results stated that secure attachment is an adaptable and diverse emotional resource which are beyond binary gender norms and adapts to various expressions of personality as well as interpersonal dynamics. Furthermore, Li, Shu and Chen (2018), in a meta-analysis of romantic attachment among Chinese adults, found only minor gender differences which are largely moderated by cultural, geographical and age-related factors. The findings align with

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evolutionary perspectives which suggests that any observed differences are based on contextual influences rather than biological distinctions.

Additionally, our society is changing, and we can see traditional gender roles shifting. Men are being encouraged to express their emotions and women are being empowered increasing their independence. This cultural evolution might be helping in closing the gap in how men and women must be experiencing attachments leading to more secure relationships.

Thus, based on the results and empirical findings the hypothesis stating that there will be no gender differences among males and females in secure attachment style is accepted.

Table 2: Table showing comparison of ambivalent attachment style between males and females using Mann-Whitney U Test

	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Ambivalent Attachment	1	51	44.41	2265.00	939.000	0.015
	2	51	58.59	2988.00		

From the above table, the mean rank for males is 44.41, while for females, it is 58.59. The Mann-Whitney U value is 939.000, with an asymptotic significance (2-tailed) value of 0.015. Since this p-value is less than 0.05, it indicates that there is statistically significant difference in ambivalent attachment style between males and females. Since the mean rank for females (58.59) is higher than for males (44.41), this suggests that females tend to score higher on ambivalent attachment style compared to males.

According to attachment theory by Bowlby development of ambivalent attachment style is in the people who have experienced inconsistent caregiving in childhood where there was fluctuation between neglect and responsiveness. However, research support that attachment patterns also evolve with life experiences and relationship dynamics in adulthood. There are existing research by Li, Shu, & Chen, 2018 and Slovak ECR-R Study, 2022 that consistently finds women having greater ambivalent attachment than men. In the current research, when we consider that the female participants are homemakers the expectations and roles that are placed on homemakers may be an influencing factor in their relational patterns and emotional needs. A study by Okonkwo, 2019 attachment styles are not only because of the childhood experiences but are shaped by adult roles, relationship dynamics and social expectations. As women are homemakers the emotional aspect of their relationship may lean towards dependence. When their needs are not acknowledged or met their attachment anxiety may increase which results into ambivalent patterns.

The observed gender differences may be influenced by early socialization patterns. Women are often encouraged from young age to prioritize relationships resulting into greater emotional reactivity in close relationships.

Thus, based on the results and empirical findings the hypothesis stating that females will score higher than males in ambivalent attachment style is accepted.

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Table 3: Table showing comparison of avoidant attachment style between males and females using Mann-Whitney U Test

	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Avoidant Attachment	1	51	58.62	2989.50	937.500	0.015
	2	51	44.38	2263.50		

From the above table, the mean rank for males is 58.62, while for females, it is 44.38. The Mann-Whitney U value is 937.500, with an asymptotic significance (2-tailed) value of 0.015. Since this p-value is less than the typical significance level of 0.05, we can conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between males and females in avoidant attachment style. Given that males have a higher mean rank (58.62) compared to females (44.38), we can infer that males tend to score higher on avoidant attachment style than females, and this difference is statistically significant.

The results can be supported with the help of Bowlby's attachment theory (1969,1980) which states that development of avoidant attachment style is in the people who have experienced emotional unavailability or rejection from their caregivers. Such individuals learn to suppress their needs and become emotionally self-sufficient. However, research supports that attachment patterns are not static, they are influenced by adult relationships and life roles, evolve with life experiences and relationship dynamics in adulthood. This is especially relevant for men in this study, as they are the chief providers because of their working status which may reinforce avoidant behaviours.

Adult attachment theory, as extended to romantic relationships by Hazan and Shaver (1987), provides additional theoretical understanding. This framework suggests that individuals with avoidant attachment styles often distance themselves from emotional intimacy and de-emphasize the value of closeness, viewing it as a challenge to their sense of independence. For working men who are navigating the demands of a professional identity, emotional closeness can be perceived as a vulnerability something that needs to be managed or restrained. The Slovak version of the ECR-R study (2022) strongly supports this trend, reporting that men consistently scored higher in attachment-related avoidance than women. The authors noted that men had avoidant tendencies across various cultures, particularly in adult, working populations. This also aligns with broader meta-analytical evidence provided by Li, Shu, and Chen (2018), who found that gender differences in avoidant attachment were males scored higher.

Cultural norms also contribute to the shaping of avoidant attachment among working males. In many societies, emotional expression among men is often viewed as a sign of weakness. As such, emotional restraint may be developed by males leading to patterns of withdrawal or discomfort with emotional closeness displaying core characteristics of avoidant attachment. This is supported by Mortis (2019), who noted that adult attachment is not only a function of early caregiving but also adult relational experiences and cultural expectations about emotional behavior.

These results validate the hypothesis that males show higher avoidant attachment than females.

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Table 4: Table showing comparison of marital adjustment between males and females using Mann-Whitney U Test

	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U	Asymp. Sig. (2- tailed)
Marital Adjustment	1	51	51.59	2631.00	1296.00	0.976
	2	51	51.41	2622.00		

The mean rank for males is 51.59, and for females, it is 51.41. The Mann-Whitney U value is 1296.000, with an asymptotic significance (2-tailed) value of 0.976. Since this p-value is much greater than 0.05, we conclude that there is no statistically significant difference in marital adjustment between males and females.

Several key theoretical frameworks can help interpret these findings. Equity Theory (Walster, Berscheid, & Walster, 1973) states that individuals in relationships seek fairness and balance in the division of responsibilities and rewards. According to this theory, when both partners perceive the relationship as equitable, marital adjustment is enhanced. The findings of this study are consistent with this theory, as they suggest that both male and female participants likely experience similar levels of adjustment due to the perception of fairness in their relationships. Previous research by Akhter (2021) has emphasized that couples, regardless of gender, tend to prioritize fairness in their interactions, which may explain the lack of significant gender differences in marital adjustment observed in this study. Additionally, The Sound Relationship House Theory (Gottman, 1999) highlights the importance of shared goals, mutual respect, and effective communication in fostering marital adjustment. In this study, both men and women cited open communication and emotional support as crucial strategies for navigating marital challenges. The fact that both genders value these elements of the relationship suggests that marital adjustment is more closely linked to relational behaviors such as communication and mutual respect, rather than to gender-based expectations. This finding aligns with Gottman’s emphasis on the significance of emotional intimacy and shared problem-solving in creating a sound foundation for marital adjustment. Studies by Faisal et al. (2025) and Jain (2024) also report that adjustment is more influenced by shared behaviors than gender.

Participant’s responses stressed that they help each other by sharing responsibilities and communicate and value emotional support during stressful times. These results support the view that marital adjustment depends on relational dynamics rather than gender, leading to the rejection of the stated hypothesis stating females will score higher than males as there are no gender differences to be found.

Table 5: Table showing comparison of marital satisfaction between males and females using Mann-Whitney U Test

	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U	Asymp. Sig. (2- tailed)
Marital Satisfaction	1	51	57.14	2914.00	1013.000	0.054
	2	51	45.86	2339.00		

The mean rank for males is 57.14, while for females, it is 45.86. The Mann-Whitney U value is 1013.000, with an asymptotic significance (2-tailed) value of 0.054. Since the p-value is

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above the typical significance level of 0.05, we can conclude that there is no statistically significant difference in marital satisfaction between males and females.

Meta-analyses by Jackson et al. (2014) and Satici & Deniz (2023) found no significant gender differences in marital satisfaction across large, diverse samples. McCoy (1994) also reported similar satisfaction levels between spouses. Marital satisfaction in this study can be explained through the Double ABC-X Model (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983), where positive perceptions and adaptive resources help couples manage stressors over time. It also aligns with the Dynamic Goal Theory of marital satisfaction (Li & Fung, 2011), which suggests satisfaction arises when partners actively pursue shared life goals, strengthening relationship stability.

The personal data from participants supports these theoretical explanations. A considerable number of respondents emphasized open communication and emotional support (29.41%) as vital coping strategies during stress. Shared responsibilities and mutual support in household and family roles were reported by 34.31% of participants, showing that gender roles may be different in modern marriages, contributing to similar satisfaction levels. Moreover, understanding (32.35%), respect (22.55%), and spending quality time together (16.67%) were reported as key contributors to marital happiness by both men and women.

Additionally, 28.43% of participants wished for more time together with their spouses, reflecting the importance of shared goals and emotional presence in marital satisfaction, as noted in the dynamic goal theory. Another 15.69% highlighted the need for improved communication, underlining its central role in emotional intimacy and satisfaction for both genders. While a few participants expressed a desire for greater family involvement, anger management, or emotional connection, these concerns were common across genders and further emphasize that the nature of marital satisfaction is not exclusively gendered but is shaped by interpersonal and contextual dynamics.

CONCLUSION

The study supports the idea that gender influences attachment style particularly ambivalent and avoidant attachment styles. Females scored higher on ambivalent attachment style and males scored higher on avoidant attachment style. There is no impact of gender on secure attachment style and marital adjustment and marital satisfaction.

An exploratory study was also conducted, and Spearman's rho analysis revealed a significant negative correlation between secure and avoidant attachment, and a positive correlation between ambivalent and avoidant styles. Avoidant attachment did not correlate with marital outcomes. A strong positive correlation between marital adjustment and satisfaction indicated that better adjustment predicts higher marital satisfaction.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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