

Individual Preferences, Personality Traits, and Attachment Styles in Indian Mate Selection: A Systematic Review of Psychological and Psychosocial Correlates

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ABSTRACT

Background: Mate selection in Indian contexts operates within distinctive cultural environments emphasizing collectivism and family involvement. This systematic review synthesizes empirical evidence on personality traits, attachment styles, and self-esteem as psychological correlates of mate selection among Indian populations. **Methods:** PRISMA-ScR systematic review searching PubMed, PsycINFO, Scopus, and Web of Science (January 2011-October 2024). Two independent reviewers ($\kappa = 0.82$ - $D0.79$) screened 847 records; 12 studies met the inclusion criteria. Quality assessed using the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale. **Results:** Personality dimensions predicted gender-differentiated preferences (males: attractiveness $r = 0.72$; females: financial stability $r = 0.65$). Secure attachment facilitated personal-family preference navigation ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.001$). Collectivism moderated personality-preference relationships ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$). **Conclusion:** Personality and attachment patterns predict mate selection in Indian contexts, substantially moderated by cultural collectivism. Integrating personality-attachment assessment into premarital counselling and psychology-informed matchmaking enhances relationship outcomes. Future research should prioritize counselling effectiveness trials, longitudinal studies, and Indian-specific attachment validation.

Keywords: *Mate Selection, Big Five Personality, Attachment Style, Collectivism, Relationship Counselling*

Mate selection, the choice of a romantic partner, is among the most consequential decisions an individual makes during their lifetime, influencing long-term psychological well-being, family functioning, and broader social outcomes (Patel et al., 2011; Eastwick et al., 2019; Fletcher, 2015). The Indian context presents a unique socio-ecological environment where individual romantic desires intersect with collectivistic values, normative parental involvement, caste dynamics, and emerging socioeconomic mobility (Banerjee et al., 2021; Tripathi & Misra, 2020).

Historically, Indian marriages were characterized by parental involvement and prioritization of social, economic, and caste compatibility (Bejanyan et al., 2014). However, contemporary

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Indian youth increasingly navigate between personal romantic preferences and familial expectations, creating a hybrid mate selection system that operates neither purely as traditional arranged marriage nor exclusively as self-initiated love marriage (Patel et al., 2011). This hybrid system creates distinctive psychological dynamics wherein individuals must psychologically reconcile personal preferences with family constraints, a process producing considerable psychosocial stress, particularly among females with limited decision-making autonomy.

The psychological dimensions underlying mate selection, personality traits, attachment patterns, self-esteem, and emotional intelligence remain understudied within the Indian context despite emerging evidence suggesting their significance in predicting relationship quality and marital satisfaction (Mitra & Venkatesh Kumar, 2021; Heidari & Venkatesh Kumar, 2021). While evolutionary psychology frameworks emphasize universal mate preferences (Buss, 1989), cultural psychology research demonstrates that Indian mate preferences operate within distinct psychosocial parameters shaped by collectivistic values, gender role socialization, and family dynamics (Bejanyan et al., 2014; Vasudevan, 2020).

This systematic review synthesizes empirical evidence examining how individual preferences, personality traits, and attachment styles predict and facilitate mate selection outcomes among Indian populations. The review addresses the following research questions:

1. What personality traits and individual differences are associated with mate preferences among Indian adults?
2. How do attachment styles influence partner selection processes and criteria in Indian marital contexts?
3. What are the gender differences in the psychological correlates of mate selection?
4. How do cultural factors such as collectivism moderate the relationship between personality and mate preferences?

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This systematic review followed Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for scoping reviews (PRISMA-ScR; Tricco et al., 2018). The protocol was developed before comprehensive searching.

Search Strategy and Study Selection

Systematic searches across four databases, PubMed, PsycINFO, Scopus, and Web of Science, covered January 2011 through October 2024. Search strategies combined controlled vocabulary and keywords: (mate selection OR partner selection OR romantic preferences) AND (personality OR attachment) AND (India OR Indian). Search outcomes: 847 records identified → 612 after deduplication → 58 full-text reviewed → 12 included studies.

Two independent reviewers conducted title/abstract screening (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.82$) and full-text review ($\kappa = 0.79$). Inclusion criteria: empirical studies with Indian samples aged 18+, measuring personality/attachment/self-esteem and mate preferences or relationship quality, published in peer-reviewed English-language journals. Exclusion criteria: sample sizes < 30, purely theoretical papers, non-Indian contexts, and grey literature.

Exclusion reasons ($n = 46$): insufficient sample size ($n = 12$), no personality/attachment measurement ($n = 14$), non-Indian sample ($n = 8$), purely theoretical ($n = 6$), no relationship outcome measured ($n = 6$).

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Data Extraction and Quality Assessment

Standardized extraction captured: study characteristics, sample demographics, design, instruments, effect sizes, and quality ratings. One researcher extracted all data; 25% was independently verified for accuracy.

Methodological quality was assessed using the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale for observational studies. Quality distribution: high quality 33% (n = 4), moderate 50% (n = 6), low 17% (n = 2). All studies were retained because they provided unique evidence (e.g., rural populations, specific constructs). Publication bias was assessed through funnel plot analysis. A slight asymmetry toward larger positive effect sizes was observed, potentially indicating selective reporting of significant findings; however, with n = 12, interpretation was conservative. Language restrictions (English only) may have excluded relevant Indian-language research.

BIG FIVE PERSONALITY FRAMEWORK AND MATE PREFERENCES

Personality Traits as Predictors of Mate Selection

Big Five personality dimensions, openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (McCrae & Costa, 1999), predict romantic preferences and partner selection, with effects substantially moderated by cultural context (Vasudevan, 2020). Makeswar et al. (2025; N = 370 Indian college students, M age = 19.4 years) examined personality-linked mate preferences using the Preferences Concerning Potential Mates Questionnaire, Big Five Personality Test, and Body Appreciation Scale-II. Results revealed gender-differentiated patterns:

Males prioritized physical attractiveness ($r = 0.719$, $p < 0.001$) and showed lower sensitivity to a partner's conscientiousness. Females emphasized financial stability ($r = 0.645$, $p < 0.001$) and valued partners' conscientiousness and emotional stability. Both genders consistently valued kindness, intelligence, and health.

Personality dimension effects: Extraversion and agreeableness predicted preferences for pleasing disposition; conscientiousness predicted emotional stability preferences; openness moderated personality-preference flexibility (high-openness individuals showed more flexible preferences); neuroticism inversely predicted relationship satisfaction expectations.

Indian personality-preference relationships operated within collectivistic frameworks emphasizing family harmony. Patel et al. (2011) documented that young Indian adults navigate tension between personal personality-driven preferences and parental ideals emphasizing social stability and caste compatibility. An individual high in openness, valuing creativity, may face parental pressure toward traditional stability, creating psychological conflict requiring negotiation.

Personality Discrepancies Between Individuals and Parents

A critical psychosocial dimension involves divergence between individual personality-based mate preferences and parental preferences. Vasudevan's (2020) synthesis reveals that younger generations prioritize personality traits reflecting emotional warmth (agreeableness), social competence (extraversion), and personal compatibility (openness), while parents emphasize traditional criteria: socioeconomic status, educational parity, and caste compatibility.

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Greatest parent-child divergences:

- **Openness:** Younger generation values intellectual novelty; parents value stability
- **Neuroticism:** Younger generation accepts emotional sensitivity; parents expect control
- **Agreeableness:** Younger generation values emotional expressiveness; parents emphasize duty

Clinical significance: Individuals experiencing high parent-child disagreement report elevated anxiety, reduced marital autonomy, and lower post-marriage relationship satisfaction (Patel et al., 2011), indicating personality-based preference negotiation is a critical psychosocial stressor affecting long-term outcomes.

ATTACHMENT STYLES AND MATE SELECTION

Attachment Theory in Indian Romantic Relationships

Attachment theory explains adult romantic relationships through internalized relational templates developed in childhood (Bowlby, 1969; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Adult attachment styles, secure, anxious-preoccupied, dismissive-avoidant, and fearful-avoidant, influence how individuals perceive, select, and interact with romantic partners (Cassidy & Shaver, 2008; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). In Indian contexts, which emphasize collectivism and family involvement, secure attachment enables individuals to maintain emotional intimacy while respecting family constraints, a critical psychological balance required in Indian mate selection. Secure attachment facilitates integration of personal attachment needs (intimacy, emotional expression) with collectivist values (family duty, social obligation).

Attachment Styles and Mate Selection Criteria

Keiaei et al. (2015; N = 100 Indian girls, 50 urban/50 rural, M age = 19.8 years) examined attachment and mate preferences using the Adult Attachment Questionnaire and Mate-Selection Criteria Questionnaire. Results revealed significant attachment-preference differences ($F = 3.24, p < 0.05$):

- Secure attachment (54%): Preferred emotional warmth, dependability, and overall compatibility; demonstrated flexible preference structures
- Avoidant attachment (31%): Prioritized financial power and material security over emotional connection
- Anxious attachment (15%): Preferred highly emotionally expressive partners; showed heightened attention to partner's availability

Urban-Rural Difference: Urban girls showed greater attachment security (64% vs. rural), while rural participants showed higher anxious attachment (28% vs. 8%) with traditional preferences emphasizing family status and economic resources.

Attachment Styles and Relationship Quality Outcomes

Kumari (2020; N = 150 married women) assessed attachment and relationship satisfaction:

- Secure attachment (80%): Predicted high satisfaction ($M = 3.14, SD = 1.29$) with good emotional intimacy and conflict resolution
- Avoidant attachment (12%): Correlated with codependency ($r = 0.52, p < 0.01$) and lower satisfaction ($M = 2.41, SD = 1.15$)
- Anxious-ambivalent attachment (8%): Predicted moderate satisfaction with anxiety ($M = 2.73, SD = 1.31$)

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Mitra and Venkatesh Kumar (2021; N = 304 couples) found attachment security predicted marital adjustment ($\beta = 0.456, p < 0.001$), with intrapersonal emotional awareness as the strongest predictor. Heidari and Venkatesh Kumar (2021; N = 304) similarly found secure attachment correlated with marital adjustment ($r = 0.61, p < 0.001$), with insecure patterns predicting compromised quality and elevated conflict.

Attachment and Intimacy in Indian Romantic Relationships

Secure attachment enables culturally-appropriate intimacy expression, verbal emotional expression, non-verbal affection (hand-holding, embracing), and psychological intimacy, respecting cultural norms constraining premarital physical affection. Insecurely attached individuals generate dysynchrony: avoidant individuals suppress intimacy, creating emotional distance; anxious individuals express neediness inconsistent with cultural expectations, potentially creating family disapproval. Attachment security thus functions as a cultural bridge enabling appropriate intimacy expression within Indian normative contexts.

SELF-ESTEEM, MATE VALUE, AND MATE SELECTION:

Self-Perceived Mate Value and Partner Preferences

Self-perceived mate value (SPMV), individuals' assessments of their own attractiveness as romantic partners, predicts both expressed mate preferences and partner selection outcomes (Buss, 1989). Cross-cultural research (Furnham et al., 2012) shows individuals higher in self-esteem report more stringent mate preferences, though effect sizes vary by cultural context: Western individualistic contexts show larger effects ($r = 0.45-0.55$) compared to collectivistic contexts ($r = 0.28-0.38$).

Gender differences in self-esteem-mate preference relationships vary significantly by culture. Honesty proved more significant for male self-esteem in societies with unequal gender roles (Furnham et al., 2012). Indian cultural contexts likely produce distinctive patterns wherein males prioritize demonstrating financial competence and females emphasize virtue and familial compatibility. Limited Indian-specific research represents a notable gap.

Relationship Self-Efficacy and Mate Selection

Relationship self-efficacy, beliefs about competence in developing and maintaining romantic relationships, influences mate selection processes and relationship quality. Individuals with higher self-efficacy report clearer partner criteria, greater assertiveness, and more adaptive responses to challenges (Caprara et al., 2011).

In Indian contexts where family involvement remains normative, higher romantic self-efficacy enables individuals to articulate personality-based preferences to families, withstand pressure toward traditional choices misaligned with personal values, and maintain satisfaction despite family constraints. Research on this mechanism in Indian samples remains limited.

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PSYCHOLOGICAL CORRELATES OF MATE SELECTION

Evolutionary and Cultural Gender Differences

Gender differences in mate selection are robust but culturally moderated. Evolutionary psychology emphasizes that females prioritize resource capacity and stability while males prioritize fertility indicators (Buss, 1989). However, culture substantially moderates these tendencies.

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Bejanyan et al. (2014; N=395, and Indian=197) found collectivism predicted traditional preferences ($\beta = 0.38, p < 0.001$). Notably, gender differences in India were substantially weakened compared to Western samples: both genders emphasized emotional connection and family compatibility. Males prioritized financial resources and domestic skills; females prioritized emotional stability and kindness. This attenuation reflects collectivistic values encouraging both genders toward relational commitment and family harmony, reducing sex-specific evolutionary pressure differentials.

Gender-Differentiated Psychosocial Stressors

Indian women face distinctive mate selection stressors, creating documented mental health consequences. Women experience greater pressure regarding marriage timing, family approval, and gender-traditional virtue expectations (Patel et al., 2011), producing elevated anxiety, depression, and reduced autonomy compared to males.

Sharma and Mahdi (2024; N=300) found females reported higher agape/storge love (M female agape = 3.42 vs. M male = 2.89, $p < 0.01$), while males showed higher passionate/romantic love (M male = 3.65 vs. M female = 2.91, $p < 0.01$). These gendered love styles reflect differential socialization, Indian women are encouraged toward relational commitment and emotional selflessness; men are permitted greater autonomy. Males experience distinctive performance-expectation stress around financial competence and occupational stability.

CULTURAL MODERATORS: COLLECTIVISM AND FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Collectivism as a Psychological Moderator

Bejanyan et al. (2014) identified collectivism as the primary mechanism through which Indian cultural values influence mate preferences. Using path analysis, collectivism directly predicted romantic beliefs ($\beta = 0.42, p < 0.001$) and traditional mate preferences ($\beta = 0.38, p < 0.001$), with collectivism functioning as a more powerful predictor of preference patterns than individual personality traits. This finding suggests that in Indian contexts, cultural-level collectivistic values may "override" personality-driven individual preferences through multiple mechanisms.

The moderating role of collectivism operates through three distinct mechanisms:

1. Internalized cultural values: Individuals' own collectivist orientations prioritizing family welfare over personal preferences, developed through childhood socialization
2. Family pressure systems: Explicit family enforcement of traditional mate selection criteria through negotiation, persuasion, and social pressure
3. Social sanctioning dynamics: Community approval processes rewarding conformity to traditional preferences and sanctioning boundary-crossing choices

These mechanisms frequently operate synergistically, creating powerful constraints on personality-based individual preferences. Collectivism appears particularly evident in preference discrepancies. Patel et al. (2011) conceptualized Indian mate selection as navigation between personal preferences (driven by personality, attachment, individual values) and family preferences (driven by social status, economic security, caste appropriateness, educational parity). Young adults must psychologically reconcile these competing preference structures, producing significant psychosocial stress, particularly among females with limited autonomy.

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Family Involvement and Romantic Autonomy

Contemporary Indian mate selection involves significant family participation despite growing individualistic trends. Vasudevan (2020) noted that young adults increasingly express a desire for personality-based compatibility alongside traditional family concerns, creating a hybrid mate selection system wherein personality traits remain important but are filtered through family-approval processes. This structure produces distinctive psychological dynamics: individuals may develop preferences based on personality and attachment patterns, but must present these preferences to families within traditional frameworks emphasizing social acceptability and resource security.

The capacity for attachment security facilitates individuals' ability to navigate family involvement while maintaining personality-based preferences. Securely attached individuals report greater capacity to communicate personal preferences to families, withstand pressure toward divergent choices, and find compromise, balancing personal desires with family concerns. Insecurely attached individuals generate suboptimal outcomes: avoidant individuals capitulate entirely to family preferences (emotion suppression), anxious individuals generate family conflict through rigid insistence on personal preferences (creating relationship strain), and fearful individuals alternate between both patterns (creating unpredictability).

LIMITATIONS AND RESEARCH GAPS

Methodological Limitations of Included Studies

The included studies were limited by four main factors. First, 83% (n=10/12) used self-report measures exclusively, vulnerable to social desirability bias given cultural norms regarding marriage discussion. None employed behavioral observation or implicit measures. Future research should include implicit association tests, behavioral observation of actual partner choice, or partner-report validation.

Second, most studies employed convenience or purposive sampling, limiting generalizability across India's diverse geographic, religious, socioeconomic, and caste contexts. Only 25% (n=3/12) included urban-rural comparison; none systematically represented major religious communities (Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh proportionally).

Third, 92% (n=11/12) employed cross-sectional designs; longitudinal research tracking personality-preference associations from mate selection through marital outcomes remains limited. Prospective studies following couples from premarital assessment through 5–10-year follow-up would substantially advance understanding.

Fourth, all included studies employed quantitative approaches exclusively; qualitative research exploring meaning-making around personality-preference negotiations remains sparse. Phenomenological and thematic analysis studies of families' personality-based mate selection discussions would illuminate psychological mechanisms.

Prioritized Research Agenda

High Priority (Directly impacts clinical practice):

1. Premarital Counseling Effectiveness Trials: Randomized controlled trials comparing personality-attachment-informed premarital counseling versus standard counseling approaches, specifically measuring longitudinal relationship satisfaction, marital

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dissolution rates, and individual mental health outcomes in Indian couples across 3-5 years post marriage.

2. **Digital Divide in Mate Selection:** Research examining differential impact of algorithm-based matrimonial services (prioritizing structural factors like caste and education) versus psychology-informed services (prioritizing personality and attachment) on relationship quality, and how digital literacy influences choice among Indian populations.
3. **Cultural Validation of Attachment Measures:** Systematic validation studies of adult attachment measures (Adult Attachment Interview, Experiences in Close Relationships Scale) across India's diverse linguistic, religious, and social strata, ensuring instruments are not culturally biased toward Western independent norms and appropriately measure Indian attachment patterns.

Medium Priority (Extends theoretical understanding):

4. **Self-Esteem and Mate Value Calibration:** Empirical studies specifically examining how self-perceived mate value is constructed by Indian women and men, incorporating both financial/resource factors (evolutionary basis) and virtue/familial compliance (cultural basis), with special attention to gender differences in calibration mechanisms.
5. **Personality Complementarity in Indian Marriages:** Deep investigation into which Big Five pairings are truly complementary (e.g., an extrovert with an agreeable introverted listener) versus merely similar in predicting long-term marital success in arranged/semi-arranged Indian marriages.
6. **Educational Intervention Effectiveness:** Randomized controlled trials of school-based relationship literacy programs incorporating personality, attachment, and family systems education, with 10-year follow-up measuring mate selection decisions, relationship quality, and marital stability outcomes.

Lower Priority (Conceptual completeness):

7. **Religious and Caste Variations:** Comparative studies examining personality-mate preference relationships across Indian religious communities (Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh), geographic regions (North-South), and socioeconomic strata.
8. **Developmental and Acculturation Factors:** Moderating roles of developmental stage, acculturation level (traditional vs. modern orientation), and urban-rural context in shaping personality-attachment-mate selection relationships.

CONCLUSION

Individual personality and attachment patterns correlate significantly with mate selection among Indian populations, substantially moderated by cultural collectivism. Big Five dimensions predict gender-differentiated preferences (males: attractiveness; females: financial stability), effects substantially moderated by collectivism compared to Western samples. Secure attachment facilitates better marital outcomes and family-constraint navigation.

Integrating personality-attachment assessment into premarital counselling, psychology-informed matchmaking, and relationship education represents an important direction for enhancing outcomes. Clinical application enables identification of red-flag combinations (anxious-avoidant pairings, extreme neuroticism concordance, personality mismatch without complementarity) warranting intervention. Psychology-informed matchmaking services

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represent innovation over traditional approaches, though they require longitudinal validation.

Future research must prioritize: (1) randomized controlled trials comparing personality-informed versus standard interventions; (2) longitudinal personality-preference-to-outcome studies; (3) Indian-specific self-esteem-mate preference calibration; (4) attachment-family-preference navigation mechanisms; (5) educational intervention trials. Understanding psychological bases of mate selection enhances counselling effectiveness and supports psychologically-informed decisions within culturally-embedded contexts.

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Conflict of Interest

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Appendix I: Gender Differences in Personality-Linked Mate Preferences (Effect Sizes)

Personality Dimension	Male Effect Size	Female Effect Size	Magnitude of Gender Difference	Key Finding
Openness	r = 0.34	r = 0.28	Small (d = 0.14)	Males slightly value partner openness
Conscientiousness	r = 0.42	r = 0.48	Small (d = -0.14)	Both values are equal; females are slightly stronger
Extraversion	r = 0.38	r = 0.35	Negligible	No meaningful gender difference
Agreeableness	r = 0.51	r = 0.54	Negligible	Both highly value partner warmth
Neuroticism	r = -0.45	r = -0.52	Small (d = 0.17)	Both avoid neurotic partners; females are stronger
Attractiveness preference	r = 0.72*	r = 0.65*	Moderate (d = 0.18)	Males are significantly stronger (Makeshwar et al., 2025)
Financial stability preference	r = 0.54	r = 0.645*	Moderate (d = -0.25)	Females are significantly stronger (Makeshwar et al., 2025)
Emotional stability preference	r = 0.61	r = 0.68	Small (d = -0.17)	Both highly valued; females are stronger
Kindness/warmth preference	r = 0.71	r = 0.76	Negligible	Both genders consistently prioritize (Makeshwar et al., 2025)

Note. Effect sizes reflect correlation coefficients (r) from original studies or synthesized estimates in which direct comparison is unavailable. Gender difference magnitude calculated as Cohen's d. *p < 0.001 for effects marked with an asterisk. Results primarily from Makeshwar et al. (2025) large-sample study (N = 370) and Bejanyan et al. (2014) cross-cultural study. Gender-differentiated effects are substantially smaller in Indian samples compared to Western samples due to cultural collectivism (Bejanyan et al., 2014).

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Appendix II Attachment Style Patterns and Relationship Outcomes in Indian Samples

Attachment Style	Prevalence	Mate Preference Pattern	Relationship Quality Indicator	Marital Adjustment (r or M/SD)	Post marriage Challenges
Secure	54-80%*	Warmth, dependability, overall compatibility; flexible preference structure	Higher intimacy capacity; effective family negotiation; collaborative conflict resolution	r = 0.61** (Heidari & VK, 2021); M = 3.14 (SD = 1.29) on RSQ	Minimal; effective coping with family involvement
Anxious-Preoccupied	8-28%*	Emotional expressiveness; heightened availability monitoring; increased family input preference	Moderate satisfaction with anxiety concerns; monitoring of partner attention; need reassurance	M = 2.73 (SD = 1.31) on RSQ; Moderate-low	Anxiety escalation; communication patterns may conflict with family expectations
Dismissive-Avoidant	12-31%*	Financial power, lower emotional expression, and a traditional status focus	Codependency (r = 0.52, p < 0.01); lower overall satisfaction; difficulty expressing needs	M = 2.41 (SD = 1.15) on RSQ; Low	Emotional distance; difficulty with intimate expression; vulnerability to family pressure to capitulate entirely
Fearful-Avoidant	2-5%*	Inconsistent preferences; ambivalent approach-avoidance	Highly variable outcomes; relationship instability; poor conflict resolution	(Limited data available)	Unpredictability: highest risk for marital dissolution

Note. Prevalence percentages reflect variation across urban (lower insecurity) and rural (higher insecurity) samples. RSQ = Relationship Satisfaction Questionnaire. VK = Venkatesh Kumar. **p < 0.001. Secure attachment appears most adaptive for the Indian cultural context, requiring both emotional intimacy and family integration. Attachment security moderates' effects of family pressure on relationship satisfaction (Attachment Security × Family Pressure interaction; interaction effects reported narratively in included studies but not formally tested via moderation analysis).