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Adult Attachment Styles and Conflict Resolution Strategies Among Romantic Relationships

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Abstract: ***To assess the relationship between Adult attachment styles and Conflict resolution strategies among romantic relationships, a correlational design was used. Responses were collected from 121 individuals, out of which 113 responses were selected and the rest 8 responses had to be eliminated due to not meeting the cut-off scores. Conflict Resolution Inventory-Self Version (CRSI-Self) scale and 36-item Experience in Close Relationships-Revised Questionnaire (ECR – RQ) scale were used. To analyze the collected data, Spearman Correlation and Mann Whitney U-test was used. The results showed significant differences between the two groups in avoidant attachment styles and acceptance styles in conflict resolution strategies. The study found a positive relationship between anxious attachment style and conflict engagement, self-protection, and acceptance, while a weak negative relationship existed between anxious and positive problem-solving styles. Key words: adult attachment style, conflict resolution strategy***

I. INTRODUCTION

"Attachment," as Bowlby defined it, was not intended to be merely a synonym for the term "social bond," nor was it meant to be generically applied to all aspects of child-parent relationships. When a child experiences stress, he or she desires an attachment figure, and when they are happy, they prefer a playmate. Because the two tasks are not mutually exclusive, one person (e.g., the carer) can fulfil both. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973) and its application to mature relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) have been utilised to provide a framework for studying individual differences in conflict responses (Pietromonaco & Barrett, et.al., 2004). Attachment attributes are most likely to be initiated in stressful conditions, such as conflictual relationship interactions, emphasising the importance of emotional support during times of stress (Kobak & Duemmler, 1994). Highly anxious people want emotional support, connection, and security from their love partner (Collins & Read, 1990), and they are more sensitive to rejection statements (Simpson et.al.,1994). People who are insecurely attached exhibit high scores on one or both attachment dimensions, while those who are securely attached have low scores on both (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Lacking an attachment figure, individuals may resort to ineffective conflict resolution tactics (Cassidy & Kobak, 1988). Anxiously connected people utilise hyperactivating tactics to reduce distance from their partners while also evoking their partner's commitment, care, and support (Shaver & Hazan, 1993). These approaches include excessive dependence on relationship partners, as well as clingy and dominating behaviour, which can lead to conflict escalation. As a result, anxious attachment is linked not just to obedient behaviour (i.e., sacrificing one's own interests to suit the partner's interests), but also to a desire for controlling conflict resolution processes (Corcora et.al., 2000). Avoidantly attached people, on the other hand, tend to utilise deactivation tactics to suppress the desire for help and attempt to deal with suffering on their own. These methods include avoidance of closeness and intimacy, denying attachment requirements, and increasing cognitive, emotional, and physical detachment from others. Similarly, avoidantly attached people avoid confrontation and avoid communicating with their relationship (Pistole & Arricale, 2003). Given that avoidantly attached people are generally uncomfortable with emotional expression, they may frequently strive to resolve conflicts and disagreements (Simpson, et.al.,1996), which may entail giving in to their partner's demands and needs.

Conflict style refers to how an individual reacts to another person when a disagreement occurs in a relationship. Given that disagreements are inherent in close relationships, a considerable amount of research has studied how partners' conflict-management skills relate to couple functioning (McGinn & Christensen, 2009). According to this study, using a constructive approach fosters pleasant and happy relationships, resulting in more open discussions and conflict resolution procedures (Cornelius & Shorey, 2007). In contrast, negative conflict resolution techniques, such as conflict engagement and avoidance, predicted low satisfaction and subjective well-being in couples, increasing the chance of conflict escalation (Siffert & Schwarz, 2011).

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Conflict resolution is 'the reduction of discord and friction between individuals or groups, usually through the use of active strategies, such as conciliation, negotiation, and bargaining' (American Psychological Association, 2018). With respect to the adult style of attachment, difficulties may be addressed, left unsolved, or worsen. It is worth noting that in the current environment, styles of conflict are classified as "destructive" in meaning that they have the potential to damage a connection. Furthermore, people who support conflict resolution approaches tend to view their relationship negatively and interpret their partner's actions negatively (Honeycutt et al., 2015), particularly if they have high attachment anxiety (Collins et al., 2006). Thus, anxiously attached people may view their partner's misdeeds as animosity or retreat (Collins et al., 2006; Gallo & Smith, 2001). Similarly, greater levels of attachment anxiety have been shown to be linked to increased conflict (Campbell et al., 2005). In this regard, anxious attachment appears to be linked to both types of detrimental conflict methods. In contrast, a style of avoidant attachment has been linked to evasive communication, avoiding arguments, and avoiding confrontations (Fowler & Dillow, 2011). As a result, it appears plausible to assume that while avoidantly attached individuals remain silent or employ delaying strategies, their partners criticise, demand adjustments, and participate in conflict.

II. METHOD

A. Design

The current study uses Non-Experimental Quantitative Research Design to examine the adult attachment styles and conflict resolution strategies among romantic relationships.

B. Participants

The total sample comprised of 121 participants, out of which 113 participants were selected for the study. The sample for the current study comprises of individuals who are either married or in a relationship (N=113) from Bangalore, Pune, Mumbai and Kolkata. The samples include people who are either studying in college, work in IT sector, banks, colleges, schools, sales, etc. Individuals in a romantic relationship, either married or in a relationship both were considered for the study (Individuals in a relationship, N = 52; Individuals who are married, N = 61). The sampling technique selected for this study is a non-probability sampling technique with convenient sampling method.

C. Tools

1) *Depression Anxiety Stress Scale 21 (DASS-21):* Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) created a brief version of the original DASS, which includes seven items from each of the following subscales: The Depression scale (DASS 21-D) measures despair, low self-esteem, and low positive affect, whereas the Anxiety scale (DASS 21-A) measures the level of autonomic stimulation, physiological hyperarousal, and the subjective sense of fear. The Stress scale items (DASS 21-S) assess nervousness, agitation, and negative affect. Each item is graded on a 4-point Likert scale from 0 ("did not apply to me at all") to 3 ("applied to me very much"). All investigations found that the DASS scales in their 21-item (DASS-21) forms had strong internal consistency: depression (range=.91 to.97), anxiety (range=.81 to.92), and stress (range=.88 to.95). Depression - Anxiety (.45 -.71;.50 or lower in all English-speaking populations (Clara et al., 2001), Anxiety - Stress (.65 -.73), and Depression - Stress (.57 -.79).
2) *Conflict Resolution Inventory-Self Version (CRSI-Self):* Constructed by Kurdek (1994). Respondents for this test stated how frequently their partners utilise each of 16 styles to cope with disputes and disagreements on a 5-point scale that varied from never (1) to always (5). Constructive problem solving, conflict involvement, withdrawal/self-protection, and compliance/acceptance each had four items. The reliability (Cronbach's) was .78 for compliance/acceptance, .85 for conflict engagement, and .86 for constructive problem solving and disengagement.
3) *The 36-item Experience In Close Relationships-Revised Questionnaire (ECR – RQ):* Constructed by Brennan et al. (1998) was used to measure the two key characteristics of attachment style, attachment and avoiding attachment. The items are graded on a 7-point scale from strong disagreement (1) to strong agreement (7). Strong agreement or higher scale scores indicate attachment anxiety or avoidance. The German adaptation of the ECRR developed by Ehrenthal, et.al., (2006) will be used in this investigation. Internal consistencies were as follows for each dimension: anxious attachment (=.81) and avoidant attachment (=.73).
4) *Data analysis*: The software used for statistical analysis is JAMOVI, which is an open-source, free computer programme for conducting statistical tests. The statistical technique used in this study are Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient to find out the relationship between attachment styles and conflict resolution strategies and Mann Whitney U-Test to examine the difference between married individuals and individuals who are dating.

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III. RESULTS

The aim of the research was to study the adult attachment styles and conflict resolution strategies among romantic relationships. The study was conducted on 113 individuals who are in romantic relationships.

Table-1 Relationship between attachment styles and conflict resolution styles

	conflict engagement	2	3	4	5
Positive-problem solving	0.090	—			
Self-protection	0.520***	0.227*	—		
Acceptance	0.416***	0.101	0.684***	—	
AnxAvg	0.300**	0.072	0.346***	0.319***	—
AvdAvg	0.098	0.170	0.220*	0.228*	0.639***

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Table 1 shows the correlation between anxious attachment style and conflict engagement style. The correlation coefficient between anxious attachment style (M = 3.18, SD = 1.25) and conflict engagement style (M = 8.54, SD = 3.23) was found to be 0.300 (p<.001) and from the table it can be observed that there is a significant positive relationship between anxious attachment style and conflict engagement style which means higher the anxious attachment, automatically the more will be the conflict engagement. The correlation coefficient between anxious attachment style (M = 3.18, SD = 1.25) and positive problem-solving style (M = 13.7, SD = 3.29) was found to be -0.072 (p = 0.449) which suggests that there is a very weak negative relationship between anxious attachment style and positive problem-solving style which means higher the anxious attachment, lesser will be the positive problem-solving, but very slightly. The correlation coefficient between anxious attachment style (M = 3.18, SD = 1.25) and self-protection style (M = 9.92, SD = 3.98) was found to be 0.346 (p < .001) and from the table it can be observed that there is a significant positive relationship between anxious attachment style and self-protection style which means higher the anxious attachment, automatically the more will be the self-protection. The correlation coefficient between anxious attachment style (M = 3.18, SD = 1.25) and acceptance style (M = 9.62, SD = 3.36) was found to be 0.319 (p < .001) and from the table it can be observed that there is a significant positive relationship between anxious attachment style and acceptance style which means higher the anxious attachment, the more will be the acceptance. The correlation coefficient between avoidant attachment style (M = 2.91, SD = 0.956) and conflict engagement style (M = 8.54, SD = 3.23) was found to be 0.098 (p = 0.302) which suggests that there is a very weak positive relationship between avoidant attachment style and conflict engagement style which means higher the avoidant attachment, more will be the conflict engagement, but slightly. The correlation coefficient between avoidant attachment style (M = 2.91, SD = 0.956) and positive problem-solving style (M = 13.7, SD = 3.29) was found to be -0.170 (p = 0.073) which suggests that there is a weak negative relationship between avoidant attachment style and positive problem-solving style which means higher the avoidant attachment, lesser will be the positive problem-solving, but slightly. The correlation coefficient between avoidant attachment style (M = 2.91, SD = 0.956) and self-protection style (M = 9.92, SD = 3.98) was found to be 0.220 (p = 0.019) which suggests that there is a positive relationship between avoidant attachment style and self-protection style which means higher the avoidant attachment, more will be the self-protection.

The correlation coefficient between avoidant attachment style (M = 2.91, SD = 0.956) and acceptance style (M = 9.62, SD = 3.98) was found to be 0.228 (p = 0.015) which suggests that there is a positive relationship between avoidant attachment style and acceptance style which means higher the avoidant attachment, more will be the acceptance.

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Table-2 *Comparison between individuals in a relationship and married individuals.*

	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	U
AnxAvg	in relationship	2	3.07	3.33	0.349	1428
	married	1	3.27	3.56	0.169	
AvdAvg	in relationship	2	2.69	2.86	0.935	1169*
	married	1	3.09	3.56	0.943	
Conflict engagement	in relationship	2	8.90	9.00	3.044	1385
	married	1	8.23	7.00	3.373	
Positive-problem solving	in relationship	2	3.73	4.50	3.326	1545
	married	1	3.64	4.00	3.287	
Self-protection	in relationship	2	0.44	0.00	0.060	1367
	married	1	9.48	9.00	0.884	
Acceptance	in relationship	2	10.52	10.00	3.433	1156*
	married	1	8.85	9.00	3.130	

Note. * $p < .05$

Table 2 shows the comparison in anxious attachment style between married individuals and individuals who are dating. The mean and standard deviation of anxious attachment style was found to be 3.07 and 1.349 for individuals in a relationship. Whereas, the mean and standard deviation of anxious attachment style was found to be 3.27 and 1.169 for married individuals. The calculated — U value for anxious attachment style between two groups is 1428 with corresponding — p value of 0.326 that there is no significant difference in anxious attachment style between the two groups. The mean and standard deviation of avoidant attachment style was found to be 2.69 and 0.935 for individuals in a relationship. Whereas, the mean and standard deviation of avoidant attachment style was found to be 3.09 and 0.943 for married individuals. The calculated — U value for avoidant attachment style between two groups is 1169 with corresponding — p value of 0.016 that there is a significant difference in avoidant attachment style between the two groups. The mean and standard deviation of conflict engagement style was found to be 8.90 and 3.044 for individuals in a relationship. Whereas, the mean and standard deviation of conflict engagement style was found to be 8.23 and 3.373 for married individuals. The calculated — U value for conflict engagement style between two groups is 1385 with corresponding — p value of 0.243 that there is no significant difference in conflict engagement style between the two groups. The mean and standard deviation of positive problem-solving style was found to be 13.73 and 3.326 for individuals in a relationship. Whereas, the mean and standard deviation of positive problem-solving style was found to be 13.64 and 3.287 for married individuals. The calculated — U value for positive problem-solving style between two groups is 1545 with corresponding — p value of 0.814 that there is no significant difference in positive problem-solving style between the two groups. The mean and standard deviation of self-protection style was found to be 10.44 and 4.060 for individuals in a relationship. Whereas, the mean and standard deviation of self-protection style was found to be 9.48 and 3.884 for married individuals. The calculated — U value for positive self-protection style between two groups is 1367 with corresponding — p value of 0.206 that there is no significant difference in self-protection style between the two groups. The mean and standard deviation of acceptance style was found to be 10.52 and 3.433 for individuals in a relationship. Whereas, the mean and standard deviation of acceptance style was found to be 8.85 and 3.130 for married individuals. The calculated — U value for acceptance style between two groups is 1156 with corresponding — p value of 0.013 that there is a significant difference in acceptance style between the two groups.

IV. DISCUSSION

The research aims to study the relationship between adult attachment styles and conflict resolution strategies among romantic relationships.

It implied a significant positive correlation between anxious attachment style and conflict engagement, anxious attachment style and self-protection, anxious attachment style and acceptance, avoidant attachment style and self-protection and acceptance. The findings of this study are in line with findings of Bonache et al., (2019) on Adult Attachment Styles, Destructive Conflict Resolution, and the Experience of Intimate Partner Violence, which showed that anxiously attached individuals used conflict engagement more frequently; additionally, engagement was connected to an increased likelihood of sexual coercion as well as emotional abuse. Similar findings are found in a study by Simpson et al., (2009) on Regulating partners in intimate relationships: The costs and benefits of different communication strategies, where it was discovered that people with nervous attachment styles tended to use self-defence mechanisms such distancing or avoiding confrontation. Results found by Davila et.al., (2001) on Attachment insecurity and the distinction between unhappy spouses who do and do not divorce are also similar. It showed that couples with anxious attachment styles were more likely to seek acceptance and reassurance from their partners during conflicts; they also tended to engage more in conflicts, thus experienced more marital distress. Another study on Adult Attachment, Stress, and Romantic Relationships was carried out by Rholes et al., in 1996. The findings demonstrated that people react differently to relationship dangers (such disagreements, feelings of rejection, or emotional detachment) in order to defend themselves. According to the study, when faced with relationship difficulties, people with avoidant attachment styles were more inclined to act in a self-protective manner. These actions could be avoidance, emotional distancing, or retreat. Contradictory results were found by Davila et.al., (2003) who conducted a study on The Meaning of Life (Events) Predicts Changes in Attachment Security which showed that individuals with avoidant attachment styles were more likely to have difficulties with acceptance and validation in their relationships.

The study also finds significant differences in avoidant attachment style and style of acceptance as a conflict resolution strategy between married individuals and individuals who are dating. Findings by Feeney et.al., (1994) conducted a study on Attachment style, communication and satisfaction in the early years of marriage that examined attachment styles and relationship satisfaction in married and dating couples, showed contradictory results i.e., no significant difference was found in avoidant attachment style between the two groups. One possible explanation for the notable distinction in avoidant attachment patterns between married and single people could be the perception of marriage as a more committed relationship than dating. Compared to people who are engaged and might believe their relationship is less committed or solid, married people might feel more assured in their relationship and as a result be less prone to display avoidant attachment patterns. Those who are married can be more dedicated to their partnership than those who are single. This increased level of commitment might make them more receptive to their partner's viewpoint and more willing to make concessions when things get tough. Over time, they might have improved their communication and conflict-resolution techniques and become more adept at using acceptance as a tactic. Married individuals may take a longer-term view while handling disagreements, taking into account how their decisions may affect the relationship's overall well-being and durability.

V. CONCLUSION

The study found a significant positive relationship between anxious attachment style and conflict engagement, self-protection, and acceptance, while avoidant attachment style was associated with self-protection and acceptance. A weak negative relationship was found between anxious attachment style and positive problem-solving, and avoidant attachment style and conflict engagement and positive problem-solving. Significant differences were found between married individuals and those dating, with married individuals having higher mean values of anxious attachment and higher acceptance styles as conflict resolution strategies. This suggests that individuals in relationships may have a more effective conflict resolution strategy.

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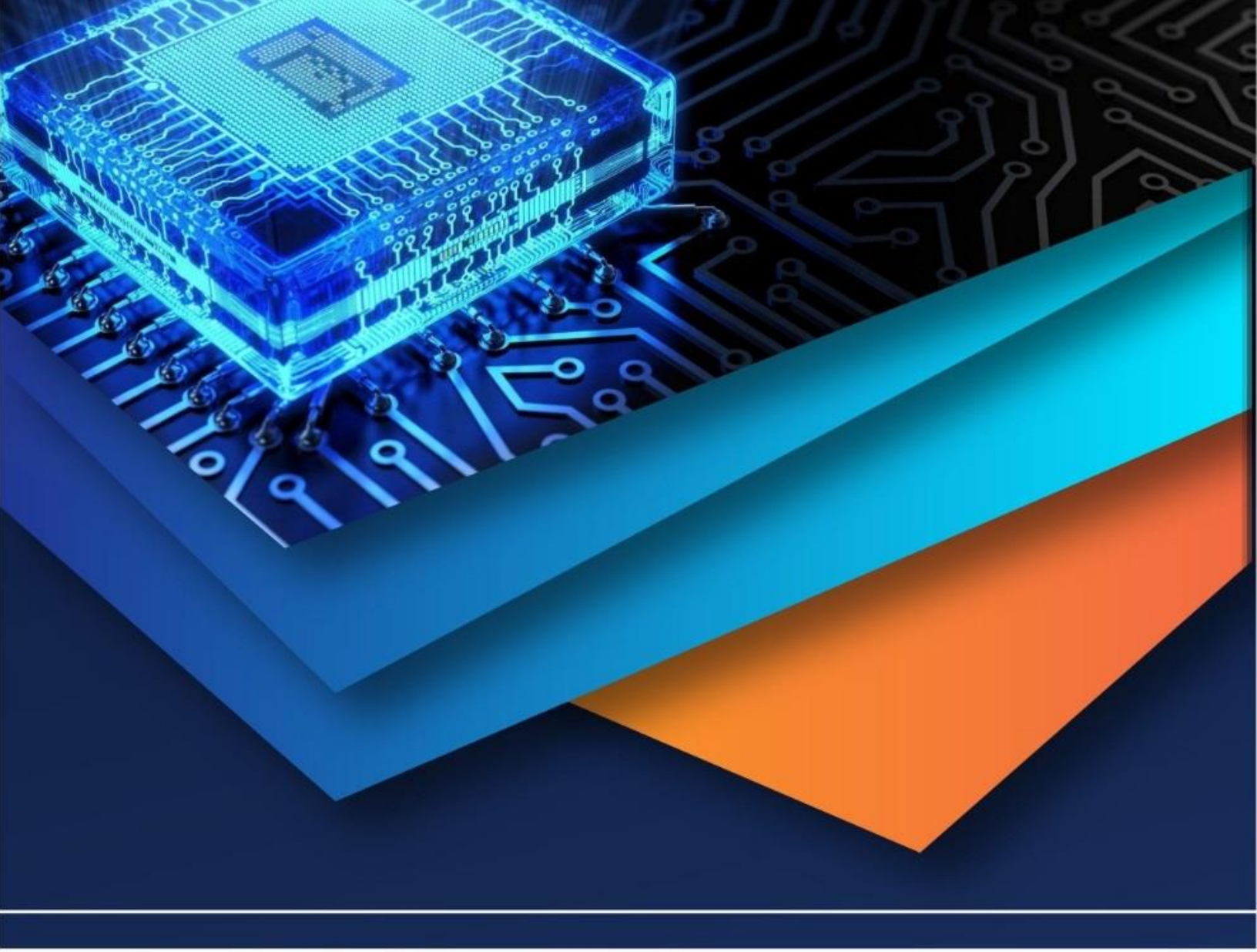
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