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# Experience in Close Relationships and Anxiety Levels among College Students: A Correlational Study

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***Abstract:*** ***The present study examined the relationship between anxiety levels and experiences in romantic relationships among university students. Grounded in attachment theory, the research explored how patterns of attachment—particularly anxious and avoidant tendencies—may influence emotional responses and psychological well-being during the university years. Young adulthood is a developmental stage where individuals form meaningful interpersonal relationships while simultaneously facing academic demands and life transitions, which may contribute to emotional stress and anxiety. A survey method was employed with a sample of 150 university students who participated voluntarily. Standardized self-report measures were used for assessment and evaluation. The Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR) scale was used to measure attachment patterns, specifically anxious and avoidant attachment tendencies in close relationships, while the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) was used to assess participants' levels of anxiety. Pearson's correlation coefficient was applied to analyze the relationship between attachment styles and anxiety levels. The findings revealed that participants demonstrated moderately elevated anxiety scores along with tendencies toward both anxious and avoidant attachment styles. However, the correlation analysis indicated very weak relationships between attachment dimensions and anxiety, and these associations were not statistically significant. These results suggest that attachment experiences in romantic relationships may not strongly predict anxiety among university students. Instead, other factors such as academic pressure, career concerns, and personal life transitions may contribute more significantly to anxiety during this developmental stage. The study highlights the importance of considering broader psychological and environmental influences when understanding student mental health.***

***Keywords: Attachment Theory, Anxious Attachment, Avoidant Attachment, Anxiety, University Students, Romantic Relationships.***

## I. INTRODUCTION

Human beings are inherently social, and close interpersonal relationships play an important role in shaping emotional well-being throughout life. During late adolescence and early adulthood, particularly in the college years, individuals experience significant psychological, social, and academic transitions. Students often face new environments, increased independence, academic pressure, and the challenge of building meaningful relationships.

These changes can create emotional stress and contribute to anxiety among college students.

Attachment theory provides an important framework for understanding how experiences in close relationships influence emotional responses. Originally proposed by John Bowlby (1969) and later expanded by Hazen and Shaver (1987), the theory suggests that early interactions with caregivers shape individuals' expectations about relationships throughout life. Adult attachment is often described along two main dimensions: attachment anxiety, which involves fear of rejection and a strong need for reassurance, and attachment avoidance, which reflects discomfort with emotional closeness and dependence on others (Brennan et al., 1998). Individuals with insecure attachment patterns may experience greater psychological distress and difficulty coping with stressful situations (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Anxiety is characterized by persistent worry, nervousness, and heightened physiological arousal (Beck et al., 1988). Among college students, anxiety may arise from academic pressure, changes in social environments, and uncertainty about future careers. According to Erikson's psychosocial theory (1968), young adulthood is marked by the stage of intimacy versus isolation, where forming meaningful relationships becomes essential for emotional development. Because close relationships can either provide support or create stress, this study uses a correlational approach to explore the relationship between experiences in close relationships and anxiety levels among college students.

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### A. Rationale

With the increasing awareness of the mental health problems experienced by college students, the significance of understanding the factors that affect anxiety levels during this developmental period cannot be overstated. Although academic pressures are known to cause stress, difficulties experienced in personal relationships, which may range from fear of rejection, trust, emotional dependence, and relationship conflicts, are known to cause a significant amount of stress for college students. This is because the college period is a developmental period characterized by the formation of meaningful relationships that last for a long time. Although research studies have shown a significant relationship between insecure attachment and anxiety, the majority of the research studies were conducted with the populations of the Western world, with limited research conducted with non-clinical college students from a variety of backgrounds. Moreover, the majority of the research studies have only focused on one dimension of adult attachment, insecure attachment, without focusing on both dimensions of adult attachment, which are attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance, using the Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR) scale and the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI). This study, therefore, aims to explore the relationship between experiences in close relationships with anxiety levels for college students.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature reviewed by the student researcher consists of previously published studies and has been organized into three distinct sections:

*1)* Research papers related to Attachment Styles in Close Relationships
*2)* Research papers related to Anxiety / Social Anxiety in Young Adults
*3)* Research papers related to Relationship Between Attachment Styles and Anxiety

### A. Research Papers Related To Attachment Styles In Close Relationships

Attachment theory explains how early relationship experiences influence emotional and interpersonal functioning in adulthood. Bartholomew (1990) proposed a four-category model of adult attachment consisting of secure, dismissing, preoccupied, and fearful attachment styles, suggesting that avoidance of intimacy often develops as a defensive strategy related to insecure attachment. Kirkpatrick and Hazan (1994) further found that attachment styles tend to remain relatively stable over time and significantly influence romantic relationship functioning and emotional well-being.

Bassi et al. (2022) examined the relationship between childhood separation anxiety, adult separation anxiety symptoms, and romantic attachment styles and found that adult separation anxiety was strongly associated with anxious attachment. Ding (2025) also reported that insecure attachment, emotional neglect, and poor relationship quality are related to higher levels of anxiety and depression among college students. These findings highlight that attachment patterns formed in relationships play an important role in emotional experiences during adulthood.

### B. Research Papers Related To Anxiety And Social Anxiety In Young Adults

Anxiety, particularly social anxiety, is commonly experienced among college students and young adults. Anand and Sinha (2024) found a positive relationship between social anxiety and fear of intimacy among young adults, suggesting that higher anxiety can lead to avoidance of close relationships. Juretić (2018) reported that beliefs about emotional expression and the quality of close relationships significantly influence emotional experiences among socially anxious individuals.

Similarly, Nair and Sinha (2023) found that conflicts in romantic relationships are associated with negative mental health outcomes among young adults, highlighting the emotional impact of interpersonal difficulties. These studies indicate that anxiety in early adulthood is closely related to interpersonal experiences and relationship dynamics.

### C. Research Papers Related To Relationship Between Attachment Styles And Anxiety

A large body of research suggests that insecure attachment styles are significantly associated with higher levels of anxiety. Öztürk and Mutlu (2010) found that university students with insecure attachment styles, such as fearful, preoccupied, and dismissing attachment, reported higher social anxiety compared to those with secure attachment. Similarly, Irfan et al. (2023) reported a strong positive relationship between anxious attachment and social anxiety among undergraduate students, identifying anxious attachment as a significant predictor of social anxiety.

Özteke-Kozan and Arslan (2022) also found that both anxious and avoidant attachment significantly predicted social anxiety among college students. Panilag and Taray (2024) further reported significant relationships between attachment patterns and social anxiety

levels among college sophomores. Read et al. (2018) demonstrated that attachment anxiety and avoidance directly influence social anxiety symptoms, with emotion regulation partially mediating this relationship.

Other research supports these findings. Wang (2024) reported that attachment style is significantly related to social anxiety, with psychological resilience partially explaining the relationship. McCarty (2005) found that insecure attachment is associated with greater social anxiety, partly due to lower self-esteem and external locus of control. Additionally, Guo and Ash (2019), in a systematic review, concluded that insecure attachment styles are consistently linked to higher anxiety symptoms, while secure attachment is associated with lower anxiety. Overall, these studies indicate that insecure attachment styles, particularly anxious and avoidant attachment, are important factors related to anxiety and emotional vulnerability.

## III. METHODOLOGY

The quantitative correlational design was used to investigate the relationship between experiences in close relationship and anxiety levels among college students. The study hypothesised that there would be no significant relationship between anxiety level and attachment styles (avoidant and anxious) among college students. A sample of 150 college students was used for the study. The study was based on voluntary sampling, where all the students were enrolled in higher learning institutions. Two psychological instruments were used to collect data for the study. The first instrument was the Experiences in Close Relationship (ECR) scale. The ECR scale was used to investigate adult attachment styles. The adult attachment styles included dimensions of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. The dimensions measured individuals' tendencies towards emotional dependence, rejection fears, and comfort with closeness. The second instrument was the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI). The instrument was used to investigate the anxiety levels of the students. The instrument measured common cognitive and physical symptoms of anxiety, including nervousness, fear, tension, and worries. The data collected was analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient to determine the relationship between the experiences in close relationship and anxiety levels among the students.

## IV. DATA ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

TABLE -1 Anxiety and Avoidant Attachment Style

Means, Standard Deviations, and Pearson Correlation Between Anxiety and Avoidant Attachment (N=150)

Descriptive Statistics

| Variable | Mean | Standard Deviation | N |
|---|---|---|---|
| Anxiety | 44.29 | 15.194 | 150 |
| Avoidant Attachment | 3.0948 | 1.06033 | 150 |

Correlations

| | Anxiety | Avoidant |
|---|---|---|
| Anxiety Pearson Correlation | 1 | -0.48 |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | | .559 |
| N | 150 | 150 |
| Avoidant Attachment Pearson Correlation | -.048 | 1 |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | .559 | |
| N | 150 | 150 |

Table 2: Anxiety and Anxious Attachment Style
Means, Standard Deviations, and Pearson Correlation Between Anxiety and Anxious Attachment (N=150)

Descriptive Statistics:

| Variable | Mean | Standard Deviation | N |
|---|---|---|---|
| Anxiety | 44.29 | 15.194 | 150 |
| Anxious Attachment | 3.6100 | 1.34413 | 150 |

Correlations

| | Anxiety | Anxious |
|---|---|---|
| Anxiety Pearson Correlation | 1 | .052 |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | | .530 |
| N | 150 | 150 |
| Anxious Attachment Pearson Correlation | .052 | 1 |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | .530 | |
| N | 150 | 150 |

## V. INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

The study examined the relationship between anxiety and two attachment styles—avoidant attachment and anxious attachment—among college students (N = 150)**.** Descriptive statistics indicated that the mean anxiety score was 44.29 (SD = 15.19)**.** The mean score for avoidant attachment was 3.09 (SD = 1.06)**,** while the mean score for anxious attachment was 3.61 (SD = 1.34)**.**

Pearson's product–moment correlation analysis revealed that avoidant attachment style had a very weak negative correlation with anxiety ($r = -0.048$, $p = .559$), indicating that higher levels of avoidant attachment were not associated with significant changes in anxiety levels among college students. Similarly, anxious attachment style showed a very weak positive correlation with anxiety ($r = 0.052$, $p = .530$). However, this relationship was also not statistically significant ($p > .05$)**.**

Overall, the findings suggest that neither avoidant attachment style nor anxious attachment style was significantly associated with anxiety among the participants**.** These results indicate that attachment styles did not significantly predict the anxiety levels of college students in the present sample. Therefore, other psychological, social, or environmental factors may play a more important role in influencing anxiety among college students.

## VI. DISCUSSION

The present study examined the relationship between anxiety and two attachment styles— avoidant attachment and anxious attachment—among college students**.** The findings revealed that both attachment styles showed very weak and statistically non-significant relationships with anxiety**.** Specifically**,** avoidant attachment demonstrated a very weak negative correlation with anxiety ($r = -0.048$, $p = .559$)**,** while anxious attachment showed a very weak positive correlation with anxiety ($r = .052$, $p = .530$)**.** These results indicate that attachment styles were not significantly associated with anxiety levels in the present sample.

The weak negative relationship between anxiety and avoidant attachment suggests that individuals who tend to maintain emotional distance and independence in relationships did not exhibit meaningful differences in their anxiety levels. Similarly, the very weak positive association between anxious attachment and anxiety indicates that individuals who experience concerns about rejection or seek reassurance in relationships did not significantly report higher anxiety.

These findings suggest that attachment styles alone may not be strong predictors of anxiety among college students**.** Anxiety in young adults may be influenced more strongly by situational and contextual factors such as academic stress, career uncertainty, social transitions, and everyday life pressures**.** Additionally, individual differences in coping strategies, social support, personality characteristics, and environmental influences may play a significant role in shaping anxiety experiences.

Overall, the results highlight that anxiety among college students is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon influenced by a range of psychological, social, and environmental factors rather than attachment styles alone.

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## VII. CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between experiences in intimate relationships and anxiety levels in college students. The study specifically examined the relationship between avoidant and anxious attachment styles and anxiety. The results revealed very low and insignificant correlations between both attachment styles and anxiety. The results indicated that attachment styles were poor predictors of anxiety. According to attachment theory, individuals who experience an insecure attachment style tend to experience high levels of anxiety. The results of the study do not strongly support the assumption that attachment style is related to anxiety in college students. The results suggest that anxiety in this period of life can be explained by factors such as academic challenges, examination stress, future career concerns, peer group influences, and the process of adapting to independent life. The development of coping strategies and social support networks can help students cope with emotional difficulties regardless of attachment style. The results of the study emphasize that anxiety in college students is a complex phenomenon that can be explained by many factors.

## VIII. LIMITATIONS

The limitations associated with the study that need consideration while interpreting the results include the use of convenience sampling for data collection. The results obtained from the study can be limited in generalization since the data collected might not be representative of the general population of college students. The study design was based on a self-report questionnaire that might be affected by the participants' level of honesty and self-awareness. The study design was also cross-sectional in nature and did not allow for the establishment of causality between attachment styles and anxiety. The study only examined two aspects of attachment styles while other psychological factors such as personality traits and coping styles were not examined in relation to anxiety. The study was conducted with a non-clinical population in which the participants might have experienced a moderate level of anxiety. The level of anxiety experienced by the participants might have reduced the relationship between the variables.

## IX. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

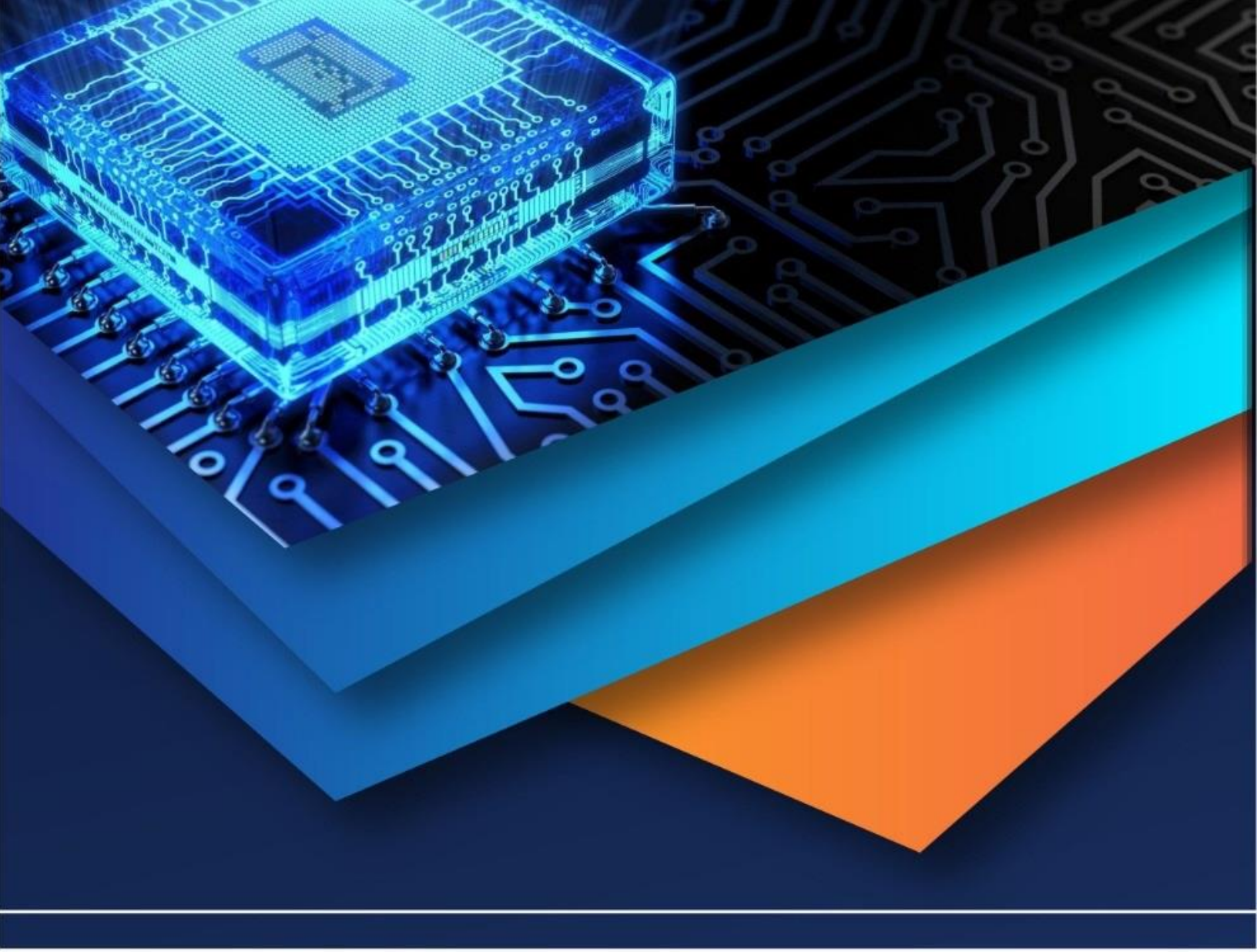
Future studies can build on the current findings by including more diverse groups of participants from different universities, cultures, and both urban and rural areas. This can help to make the findings more generalizable. Further studies can be done on groups of students belonging to different age groups. This can provide more insight into the relationship between attachment experiences and anxiety. Longitudinal studies can be done to assess the relationship between attachment styles and anxiety over a period of time. This can help to assess whether the relationship between attachment styles and anxiety is long-lasting. Further studies can be done to assess other psychological constructs such as self-esteem, coping skills, emotional control, resilience, etc., to understand the relationship between anxiety among college students. Qualitative studies can be done to assess the relationship between relationship experiences and anxiety among college students. Further studies can be done to assess the relationship between relationship experiences and anxiety among college students. Evaluation of counseling interventions can be done to assess the relationship between relationship experiences and anxiety among college students.

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