

CROSS-CULTURAL ANXIETY, PARENTAL AND PARTNER ATTACHMENTS AND THEIR CORRELATION WITH RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION

SAFINA BINTE ENAYET¹ AND MST. MALEKA PERVIN^{2*}

¹*Brac University, Bangladesh*

²*Department of Psychology, University of Dhaka*

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Abstract

The present study was designed to investigate the cross-cultural anxiety, parental attachment, partner attachment and their correlation with the relationship satisfaction. In this study, the data were collected by voluntary sampling method and a total of 434 participants were recruited. One-way ANOVA analysis showed that Americans, Bangladeshi, and English reported higher levels of anxiety in their life than Thai nationalities which indicated that Thai have more relationship satisfaction than other nationalities. Further analysis showed that there is a significant positive correlation between anxiety and avoidant attachment, anxious attachment, mother avoidant, mother anxious, father avoidant, father anxious. In the analysis of attachment style, it was found that father avoidant and mother avoidant attachment was higher than father anxious and mother anxious attachment with their children.

Introduction

Anxiety is an emotional state which includes feelings of anticipation, stress, and nervousness accompanied by physiological arousal⁽¹⁾. Theoretical and scientific interest in anxiety reflects the mainstream concern in the behavioural and medical sciences. Several researchers have found anxiety to be associated with adult attachment as the consequence of interpersonal cognitions of the desire to be close to one another or fear of refusal and abandonment⁽²⁾.

Attachment plays a vital role in predicting interpersonal relationships between parents–children and adults’ romantic relationships^(3,4). There are mainly two types of adult attachment: secure attachment and insecure attachment. Secure attachment is a healthy style of attachment that allows individuals to function autonomously, which is often initiated by an intrinsic motivation that helps in providing long-term relationship satisfaction^(5,6). In contrast, people with an insecure attachment style have difficulty creating emotional ties with their significant others⁽⁷⁾. Joeng *et al.*⁽⁸⁾ suggested that a person who experienced secure parent-children attachment in childhood is more likely to have positive romantic relationships in adulthood. On the other hand, a person who had insecure

* Author for correspondence: malekapervin@du.ac.bd

attachment experience with their parents in childhood may have negative relationship experience in their adulthood^(5,9).

Anxious attachment is most frequently negatively connected to the quality of a relationship between women as well as the involvement of their male partner's satisfaction in the relationship^(10,11). A high level of anxious attachment leads an individual to struggle in a romantic relationship⁽¹²⁾. On the other hand, avoidant attachment is more often negatively related to the quality of the relationship satisfaction between men and their female partners^(11,13,14).

Previous research has revealed adult attachment as an important predictor of relationship satisfaction⁽¹⁵⁾. Kim and Miller⁽¹⁶⁾ stated that individual who has experienced of parental anxiety, they are having a high level of anxious attachment in their present adult relationship with a partner. People having anxiety report fear of appraisal by others which may lead them to relationship dissatisfaction^(17,18). Montesi *et al.*⁽¹⁷⁾ also suggested that a high level of anxiety leads an adult toward a low level of sexual communication and sexual satisfaction which may hamper overall relationship satisfaction. As a result, an adult individual may be unable to build an intimate relationship to ensure relationship satisfaction⁽¹⁷⁾. Moreover, anxious attachment and avoidant attachment have been found negatively connected with the quality of relationship and relationship satisfaction of an individual⁽¹⁹⁾. Another study found that avoidant attachment was negatively correlated with satisfaction and support in relationships while confrontation was correlated with anxious attachment⁽²⁰⁾.

There has been no cross-cultural research carried out to measure parental attachment and partner attachment and its correlation with anxiety and relationship satisfaction. An individual having a high level of attachment anxiety are prone to suffer in a romantic close relationship with their partner which may carry out significant inferences for their physical health and psychological well-being⁽¹²⁾. While there has been significant research has observed the associations between adult attachment and relationship satisfaction, there is a lack of understanding of the paths leading from attachment and relationship satisfaction⁽²¹⁾. This study contributes to measuring the relationship satisfaction on adult attachment and the effect on anxiety by comparing among four nationalities- English, Thai, Bangladesh, and American. In addition, the anxious and avoidant attachment styles substantially predicted both divorce and the relationship status of a single vs partner⁽²²⁾. Therefore, we carried out measures that how the mother-anxious, mother-avoidant, father-anxious and father-avoidant attachment styles are associated with relationship satisfaction.

Objective of the study

The objectives of the present study were:

1. To investigate the effect of relationship satisfaction on anxiety by comparing among four nationalities- English, Thai, Bangladesh, and American.

2. To assess the relationship among anxiety, relationship satisfaction, and attachment styles.

Materials and Methods

Participants and Design of the study: This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychology, University of Chester, UK. For the present study, the data were collected by voluntary sampling method. A total of 434 participants were filled up the questionnaires. All the participants of this study were over the 18 years old and who are from different nationalities are currently staying in the United Kingdom. Participants are voluntarily taking part in the study as the data were collected online through and social media (Facebook and Instagram). They must agree to the consent of this online survey. All the participants have the ability to write and speak in English as there were living in the UK. It took an approximate 40 minutes to fill out the whole questionnaire.

Measuring instruments: The survey included a Demographic Questionnaire, Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale, Relationship Satisfaction Scale, Experiences in Close Relationships Scale, and Parental Caregiving Style Scale.

Demographic Questionnaire: The Participants were asked for demographic information, including sex, age, nationality, parental divorce, and details of their resident parent and their responses to the following measures relating to anxiety.

Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS)⁽²³⁾. The seven items examining anxiety will be used from this 14-item scale, this indicates how anxiety emotion affects routine activity. It used Likert scale points 1-4 where 1 was an indicator the most of the time anxiety emotion affects routine activity and 4 was the indicator of not at all. They will be asked to choose one answer which mostly closes their feelings. The scale has previously been tested using nonpsychiatric patients⁽²⁴⁾, and the cut-off points of the scale are useful markers for borderline or clinical anxiety and depression. Moreover, this scale had previous good indications of reliability and validity⁽²⁵⁾. The questions were asked to the participants as an example were (Q1: "I can laugh and see the funny side of things" and Q2: "I feel restless as if I have to be on the move".).

Relationship Satisfaction Scale (RSC)⁽²⁶⁾, a 7-items scale designed to measure current relationship quality and satisfaction by using Likert scale points 1-5 where 1 was an indicator of the low level of satisfaction and 5 was the indicator of a high level of satisfaction. The questions were asked to the participants as an example were (Q1: "How well does your partner meet your needs?" And Q2: "In general, how satisfied you with your relationship are?"). The scale is the indicator of good reliability and validity from the prior use in other studies⁽²⁷⁾. Cronbach's Alpha of Relationship Satisfaction was 0.89. The same 9 items are repeated to assess attachment style with regards to mother and father. The questions were asked to the participants as an example were (Q1: I usually discuss my

problems and concerns with this person and Q2: I prefer not to show this person how I feel deep down). The scale is the indicator of good reliability and validity from the prior use in other studies⁽²⁸⁾.

Experiences in Close Relationships⁽⁵⁾. A 36-items scale indicating attachment styles to 'romantic' partner. The scale is the indicator of good reliability and validity from the prior use in other studies⁽²⁹⁾. The questions were asked to the participants as an example were (Q1: "I am very comfortable being close to romantic partners" and Q2: "I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them"). The Cronbach's Alpha of the avoidant attachment was 0.94, anxious attachment was 0.93, mother avoidant was 0.89, mother anxious was 0.92, father avoidant was 0.92 and father anxious was 0.95.

Parental Caregiving Style Scale^(30,31). This collated attachment measure ascertains how the participant's perceived the parenting they received from both mother and father. They were asked to give a single score from 1 – 7 for each of the warm, cold, and inconsistent styles for both mothers and fathers.

Data Analysis: Data were analysed by using SPSS software version 26. Descriptive statistics, such as mean, standard deviation, frequency, one-way ANOVA, and correlation were used as outcome measures and the alpha level was set at $p < 0.01$ and < 0.05 .

Results and Discussion

A total of 434 participants, the nationalities of the participant were: English (N=206, 47.5%), Thai (N=109, 25.1%), Bangladeshi (N=82, 18.9%), American (N=12, 2.8%), and 25 (5.7%) participants did not state their nationality. There were 103 males (23.7%), 327 females (75.3%) and 1% of the participants did not share about their gender identity. A total of 165 (38%) participants experienced parental divorce and parents of 269 (62%) participants remain intact.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Anxiety, Relationship Satisfaction, Avoidant Attachment and Anxious Attachment, Father and Mother Avoidant, and Father and Mother Anxious.

Parameters	Mean (SD)	Minimum	Maximum
Anxiety	16.00 (4.41)	7.00	28.00
Relationship Satisfaction	26.68 (6.27)	8.00	35.00
Avoidant Attachment	3.81(1.54)	1.29	8.86
Anxious Attachment	4.70 (1.66)	1.29	8.57
Father Avoidant	3.87 (1.59)	1.00	7.00
Mother Avoidant	3.11 (1.34)	1.00	7.00
Father Anxious	2.80 (1.88)	1.00	7.00
Mother Anxious	2.39 (1.69)	1.00	7.00

Results reported in Table 1 shows that most participants appeared to be a moderate level of anxiety. Moreover, the result showed that most participants were highly satisfied with their relationships with their romantic partner. The mean score of father avoidant and mother avoidant found almost similar which means father and mothers avoidance pattern is quite similar towards their children. While the mean score of father anxious and mother anxious found lower than the mean avoidant scores of father and mother. This suggests that the father and mother has more avoidant with their children than anxiety.

Table 2. Relationships among Anxiety, Relationship Satisfaction, Avoidant Attachment and Anxious Attachment, Father and Mother Avoidant, and Father and Mother Anxious.

Parameters	Nationalities				P value*
	American (N= 12)	Thai (N= 106)	Bangladeshi (N= 80)	English (N= 206)	
Anxiety	18.66 (3.52)	13.36 (3.39)	16.46 (4.30)	17.07 (4.39)	F (3,402)= 21.40**
Relationship Satisfaction	24.55 (7.35)	26.36 (5.15)	26.04 (6.60)	27.15 (6.53)	F (3,353)= 1.01
Avoidant Attachment	4.17 (2.02)	3.72 (1.33)	4.04 (1.41)	3.77 (1.63)	F (3,370)= 0.814
Anxious Attachment	5.30 (1.94)	4.27 (1.46)	5.06 (1.94)	4.85 (1.75)	F (3,366)= 4.26
Father Avoidant	5.06 (1.37)	3.49 (1.24)	3.42 (1.11)	4.12 (1.78)	F (3,385)= 10.68**
Father Anxious	4.42 (2.00)	2.54 (1.53)	2.55 (1.72)	2.97 (2.03)	F (3,389)= 4.51*
Mother Avoidant	3.73 (1.38)	3.17 (1.20)	2.91 (0.96)	3.11 (1.49)	F (3,397)= 1.50
Mother Anxious	2.38 (1.54)	2.42 (1.59)	2.70 (1.79)	2.29 (1.72)	F (3,398)= 1.22

** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

There is a significant difference between the level of anxiety and nationalities ($F(3,402) = 21.40, p < 0.001$). Participants from America (18.66), Bangladesh (16.46) and England (17.07) reported a significantly a higher level of anxiety than those from Thailand. This suggests that peoples from Thailand are more emotionally stable and satisfied in their relationship. Furthermore, there is a significant difference between father avoidant attachment and nationalities ($F(3,385) = 10.68, p < 0.001$). Americans reported high level of father avoidant attachment (5.06) than Thai, Bangladeshi, and English (3.49, 3.42, and 4.12). Similarly, for the father anxious attachment, American's score significantly higher than Thai, Bangladeshi, and English and the difference among nationalities was significant ($F(3,389) = 4.51, p < 0.05$). There was no significant difference between different nationalities in terms of relationship satisfaction, anxious attachment, mother avoidant, and mother anxious.

Table 3. Correlation among the variables (N=434)

Parameters	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Anxiety	1										
Relationship Satisfaction	-0.234**	-									
Avoidant Attachment	0.302**	-0.558**	-								
Anxious Attachment	0.509**	-0.315**	0.336**	-							
Father Avoidant	0.327**	-0.211**	0.260**	0.261**	-						
Father Anxious	0.300**	-0.210**	0.300**	0.254**	0.576**	-					
Mother Avoidant	0.224**	-0.257**	0.304**	0.164**	0.249**	0.143**	-				
Mother Anxious	0.210**	-0.236**	0.323**	0.179**	0.062	0.440**	0.474**	-			

** $p < 0.01$

Table 3 shows that there is a significant correlation with anxiety to all the variables in 0.01 level. The result showed that there is a significant positive correlation between anxiety and avoidant attachment, anxious attachment, mother avoidant, mother anxious, father avoidant, and father anxious. This study found a negative correlation between relationship satisfaction and anxiety. This suggests that a high level of relationship satisfaction results in a low level of anxiety. This outcome is like the outcomes reported by Kane *et al.*⁽³²⁾ that when an individual will be more satisfied in their relationship, their anxiety will be less and as a result, they will show more care towards their partner.

There are some limitations that should be considered. First, the sample size is relatively small, and there was considerable variation in the proportion of the participants from different nationalities. This might have reduced the statistical power and influenced the obtained result. A second limitation is that this study is not a longitudinal study which could not directly see the progress for child attachment to adult attachment with parenting as a mediating variable. A third limitation is the use of subjective-participant specific questionnaires which have its inherent limitation as it is subjected to their understanding questionnaire. Besides, cultural aspect can play a vital role to fill up the questionnaire. People may not understand the questionnaire. They filled up the questionnaire according to their understanding. As a result, people might be biased about the understanding of the questionnaire.

Despite the limitations, this study has important implications. These findings shed light on the potential for future interventions to help the future parent to improve their relationships with their children and establish a secure attachment than an anxious and avoidant attachment. This research finding can be implemented for the parenting program in the Hospital or National Health Service. Usually, National Health Service can ensure training programs for the parents which will help the parents to aware about their

attachment style. Besides, they will learn how to practice secure attachment with their children.

Moreover, nursery schools can observe the behaviour of the children and identify the attachment style and arrange mental health counselling service at the school and family to resolve the issue of insecure attachment. Childhood attachment experiences might also offer a way to understand romantic adult relationships⁽³³⁾. In this way, the impact of anxious and avoidant attachment will minimize, and it would be possible to establish a secure attachment style. College, university, and higher education institutions can provide mental health counselling service for young adults. If young adults can resolve their attachment insecurity with their partner, that will help them to improve their adult attachment style.

Further research is needed to find out the reason behind the relationship satisfactions of English people, what are the cultural differences and what other factors are underlined for the satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Further qualitative researches are needed to the source of avoidant and anxious attachment and how the secure attachment can be established in the parent-child relationship.

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