# The Influence of Parenting Styles on Attachment Dynamics among Adult Couples

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the correlation between parenting styles and adults' current attachment in intimate partners. The data (N=250) was collected from District Haripur using purposive sampling. The study utilized a correlational research design. Two scales were employed to measure the objectives of the study: the Experiences in Close Relationships-Relationship Structures (ECR-RS) scale to measure current attachments of individuals, and the Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire to assess three basic parenting styles. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, t-test, and ANOVA were used for data analysis. The findings of this study indicate a significant relationship between parenting styles and attachment styles. Specifically, it was found that females exhibited higher levels of anxious attachment, while males reported higher levels of avoidance attachment. This study has significant implications for clinical psychology, educational psychology, counseling psychology, and social psychology.

Keywords: Parenting styles, Attachment styles, Gender differences, Anxiety, Haripur

## INTRODUCTION

The influence of parenting styles on children's behavior has a long history, dating back to ancient philosophers like Aristotle and Plato. In 1689, John Locke argued that parents are primarily responsible for their children's education and that effective parenting is crucial for the well-being of society (Locke, 1689). Despite extensive research on parent-child relationships, the question of which parenting style is most beneficial for children's outcomes remains unanswered (Hedstrom, 2016). The ongoing debate underscores the complexity of this issue and the need for further investigation.

Diana Baumrind developed the concept of parenting style, which was later expanded upon by researchers like Cherry (2015) and Baumrind (1966). According to these researchers, most parents can be categorized into three main parenting styles. However, Darling (1999) proposes a

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more nuanced approach, identifying four parenting methods based on the level of parental responsiveness and demandingness: permissive, authoritative, authoritarian, and neglectful.

Authoritative parenting, as described by Baumrind (1966), involves providing guidance to children in a problem-oriented and rational manner, fostering effective communication and strong relationships. In this style, parents set high expectations and offer support, promoting open communication and reasoning. According to Hoskins (2014), authoritative parents demonstrate greater responsiveness and demands, supporting their children's autonomy while establishing clear boundaries. This approach emphasizes open dialogue, clear explanations for rules, and positive reinforcement to achieve goals. Authoritative parenting is widely considered the most beneficial and effective approach for most families, promoting children's well-being and happiness. Nijhof and Engels (2007) also emphasize the importance of authoritative parenting in the healthy psychological and social development of adolescents, playing a crucial role in shaping their well-being and life outcomes.

On the other hand, authoritarian parenting involves enforcing strict rules and expectations without providing explanations or reasoning. Children are expected to obey without question, and disobedience is met with punishment. Cherry (2015) explains that authoritarian parents often fail to provide rational justifications for their rules, relying solely on their authority. According to Hoskins (2014), authoritarian parents are highly demanding but unresponsive to their children's needs. This style is characterized by its punitive and authoritarian approach, emphasizing obedience and tradition (Sarwar, 2016). It is often seen as a less nurturing and more dictatorial approach, prioritizing compliance over children's emotional and psychological well-being.

#### **Attachment Styles**

The attachment style, which is based on John Bowlby's attachment theory, describes how intimate relationships work, particularly with parents, children, or romantic partners. This concept includes how much an individual trusts and believes that their attachment figure will be available and responsive to them, acting as a secure base for exploration and a safe haven for comfort, protection, and support. A secure attachment allows individuals to confidently navigate the world, including physical environments, interpersonal relationships, and self-reflection (Levy, Ellison, Scott, & Bernecker, 2011).

Adult attachment styles are characterized by two continuous dimensions: avoidance and anxiety (Fraley, Hudson, Hefferman, & Segal, 2015). People with high levels of attachment avoidance and/or anxiety are considered to have insecure attachments (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016). These dimensions reflect different levels of discomfort with emotional intimacy, dependence, and vulnerability, which all influence relationships and patterns of attachment.

i. Attachment avoidance is marked by a negative perspective on others and discomfort with emotional closeness and intimacy. People with high attachment avoidance tend to avoid emotional connections and fear vulnerability and rejection. They often suppress their emotions and thoughts, thinking that showing weakness or pain could lead to being abandoned or separated from others (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003, 2016; Shaver &

Mikulincer, 2007). This avoidance coping strategy aims to maintain emotional distance and protect oneself from potential harm.

ii. Attachment anxiety is characterized by a negative self-perception and an intense fear of rejection. People with high attachment anxiety often have a history of inconsistent or unreliable attachment figures, resulting in a constant fear of being abandoned. They believe that expressing their needs and vulnerabilities will help them obtain protection and support, so they frequently become overly dependent on others and constantly seek reassurance (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003, 2016; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2007). This anxiety-driven behavior stems from a deep-seated insecurity and a constant need for validation. According to Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth (1991), the attachment formed between parents and children has a lasting impact on behavior, cognition, and emotions from infancy to adulthood. Disruptions in this attachment can result in painful experiences and grief. Hazan and Shaver (2017) applied attachment style theory to understand adult relationships, including social, romantic, and sexual relationships. They suggested that attachment style reflects internalized beliefs about oneself and others, which influence intimate relationships. This attachment style is considered a stable personality dimension that shapes communication patterns in childhood and adulthood (Ma, 2006). The internal working models developed in childhood continue to influence adult attachment strategies and communication styles. Securely attached individuals perceive themselves as deserving of love and connection, while insecurely attached individuals may experience the opposite.

## The Impact of Parenting Styles on Adult Attachments

Hicks (2020) found that anxious attachment leads to increased relational aggression, specifically through jealousy, particularly among individuals with higher mate value. Avoidant attachment has a stronger impact on relational aggression among those with average mate value. Doinita and Maria (2015) investigated the correlations between adult attachment types and parenting styles and revealed a significant correlation between secure adult attachment and authoritative parenting style. Guerrero (2015) examined the relationship between perceived parenting styles, current attachment style, and emotion dysregulation and found a significant connection between parenting styles and attachment styles. Marazziti et al. (2010) demonstrated that attachment styles influence jealousy expression, with preoccupied and fearful-avoidant individuals experiencing more jealousy than secure individuals. Neal and Frick-Horbury (2001) found that 92% of students with authoritative parenting styles were securely attached, and attachment styles alone predicted intimacy patterns, with securely attached individuals scoring higher on personal intimacy and belief in others' ability to be intimate.

#### Statement of the Problem

The present study explores the relationship between three major parenting styles; authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive, two attachment styles; attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety, and romantic jealousy in intimate partners. This literature review on parenting styles, attachment styles and romantic jealousy, will summarize the goal of present study.

#### **Research Hypotheses**

- i. If children are raised with authoritative parenting styles, they are more likely to develop secure attachment styles in adulthood.
- ii. If children are raised with either authoritarian or permissive parenting styles, they are more likely to develop insecure attachment styles in adulthood.
- iii. Men who have secure attachment styles will demonstrate more supportive and less avoidant behavior in their relationships, compared to men with insecure attachment styles.
- iv. Women who have secure attachment styles will exhibit more nurturing and less anxious behavior in their relationships, compared to women with insecure attachment styles.

## METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the study is to comprehend and ascertain the connection between different styles of parenting and type of attachment in subsequent adult relationships. The purpose of the study is to compare the effects of gender on romantic jealousy.

#### **Participants and procedure**

The present study consists of 250 participants, male (n=115) and female (n=135). Personal approach to participants was conducted in order to collect data. Informed consent was taken from participants. Necessary instructions regarding the questionnaires were provided. And for online data collection participants were provided a URL link directing them to a consent form. Participants provided consent to participate then completed the study measures online through Qualtrics, beginning with the demographic questionnaire followed by the rest of the measures in random order. After the data collection, the data was fed into SPSS 27 for further analysis.

#### Instruments

The Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ; Robinson, Mandleco, Olsen, & Hart, 2001) employs a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "never" (1) to "always" (5), to assess parenting styles across authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive dimensions. Despite a review of the PSDQ's psychometric properties by Olivari et al. (2013), reliability and validity data remain limited. However, Robinson et al. (2001) reported adequate internal consistency reliabilities for the authoritative ( $\alpha = .86$ ), authoritarian ( $\alpha = .82$ ), and permissive ( $\alpha = .64$ ) scales. While Cronbach's alpha levels are generally acceptable for the authoritarian (.62-.95) and authoritative (.71-.97) scales, the permissive scale exhibits consistently lower reliability (.38-.95), as noted by Olivari et al. In the present study, the PSDQ scales demonstrated the following Cronbach's alpha levels: authoritative ( $\alpha = .84$ ), authoritarian ( $\alpha = .74$ ), and permissive ( $\alpha = .73$ ).

*Experiences in Close Relationships-Relationship Structures scale (ECR-RS)* is a selfreport questionnaire comprising 9 items that assess attachment dimensions (avoidance and anxiety) in various relationships, including romantic partnerships. The Romantic Partner Scale demonstrates high internal consistency reliability with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.80. Respondents rate items on a 7-point Likert scale from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7), yielding separate scores for avoidant and anxious attachment to their romantic partner. Higher scores indicate greater insecure attachment. The ECR-RS exhibits convergent and discriminant validity, as it relates to key aspects of relationship functioning (e.g., satisfaction, commitment, investment) and its subscales correlate with those of longer inventories (e.g., ECR-R), demonstrating reliable measurement of romantic attachment (Hicks, 2020).

#### **Analysis and Interpretation of Data**

In this step, the collected data was analyzed in SPSS 27 version. On the basis of outcome of entered data, the researcher interpreted the study phenomenon by using correlation statistics, t test, descriptive and annova test. On the basis of the above analysis, the hypotheses of the current study were supported or refuted.

## RESULTS

#### **Descriptive statistics**

Table shows the descriptive statistics and alpha reliability for all study variables. The reliability coefficient has been determined by computing Cronbach's alpha coefficient for Experiences in Close Relationships-Relationship Structures scale (ECR-RS) ranging from .221 to .533. The coefficient alpha for The Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire ranges from .708 to 2.87. Alpha reliability for The Multidimensional Jealousy Scale is .82. This indicates that the scales had internal consistency. The mean and standard deviation for all study variables ranging from .88131 to 4.43 and .52 to 1.34 respectively, which indicates that the study measures the desired content and less variation exists in study variables. The values for skewness and kurtosis for all study variables are less than 1, which indicates that data is normally distributed.

					Range			
Variables	No of items	α	М	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Average Avoidance	6	.72	3.281	.687	.86	5.57	.15	.37
Average Anxiety	3	.83	4.43	1.34	1.00	6.67	.205	530
Authoritative Parenting Style	8	.70	2.90	.806	1.00	4.88	.195	569
Authoritarian Parenting Style	8	.77	3.02	.806	1.00	4.75	.436	735
Permissive Parenting Style	8	.71	2.94	.83	1.00	4.88	.436	560
Uninvolved Parenting style	8	6.87	.88	1.00	5.00	.11	.593	208

Table No 1: Descriptive statistics and alpha reliability of study variables

*Note:*  $\alpha$ = Alpha coefficient, M= Mean of variables, Min= Minimum range, Max= Maximum range, SD= Standard deviation.

## **Correlational statistics**

Table shows Pearson's correlation for study variables. Results indicates that average avoidance is strongly correlated with authoritative parenting styles(r=.764, \*p=.05) and permissive parenting (r=.731, p= .05), while negatively correlated with authoritarian parenting style (r=.731, \*p=.01).

S. No	Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1	Average Avoidance attachment	-	150*	.764**	115	.731**
2	Average Anxiety attachment		-	496**	531**	509**
3	Authoritative Parenting Style			-	.641**	.698**
4	Authoritarian Parenting Style				-	.731**
5	Permissive Parenting Style					-

## Table No 2: Correlation between study variables

\**p*<.05, \*\**p*<.01

## Mean differences statistic (Analysis of Variance

Results from table no 3 indicates that avoidance attachment is higher in male (M= 6.33, SD=.31), and female score higher on anxiety attachment (M=5.33, SD= 1.30)

Variables	Male (n=115)		Female (n=135)				CI 95%	
	М	SD	M	SD	t	Р	LL	UL
Average Avoidance attachment	6.33 6.33	.31	3.24	.727	1.01	.032	082	.256
Average Anxiety attachment	4.57	1.39	5.33	1.30	1.36	.021	.105	.576

\*=*p*<.05

*Note:* SD= Standard Deviation, M= Mean, t= mean differences of variables, p= significance, LL= Lower Level, UL= Upper Level.

#### DISCUSSION

The objective of the study was to measure the correlation between parenting styles and two attachment styles; attachment avoidance and anxious attachment, among couples. Data, from participants including married, engaged, were collected District Haripur of Pakistan through online and door to door survey. For measuring the study purpose, The Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire by Robinson, Mandleco, Olsen, & Hart, 2001, and Experiences in Close Relationships-Relationship Structures scale (ECR-RS) (with 2 sub-dimension attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety) by Fraley, Heffernan, Vicary, & Brumbaugh, 2011) were applied. Alpha reliability coefficient of all scales was computed. The reliability of all the research instruments has been shown in table 1. Cronbach Alpha for ECR-RS with two dimensions, average avoidance and average anxiety was .72 and .83 respectively. Cronbach Alpha for PSQD was .68 to .77. To achieve the objectives of the study various hypotheses on correlation between parenting styles, attachment styles and romantic jealousy were formulated.

Results from study reveals that average avoidance is strongly correlated with authoritative parenting style and permissive parenting, while negatively correlated with authoritarian parenting style. In previous literature Millings, Walsh, Hepper, and O'Brien (2012) discovered a link between more authoritative parenting styles and low levels of avoidant attachment. Avoidant parents seldom show affection to others, maintain a considerable emotional distance from them, and prioritize discipline above affection (Ktistaki et al., 2014). To put it simply, there is a substantial negative connection (r = -0.760) between parents who exhibit high levels of attachment avoidance and either have an authoritarian parenting style or are not strongly bonded. According to Hatamy et al. (2011)'s research, there is a strong positive correlation between an authoritarian parenting style and an avoidant attachment style. As thus, this outcome contradicts the findings of Hatamy et al.'s earlier research (2011). Additionally, a prior study by Millings et al. (2012) discovered a link between more authoritative parenting approaches and lower levels of avoidant attachment. The inconsistent behavior has an unclear cause. On the other hand, the disparities might result from variations in the sites where the studies were carried out.

Higher levels of attachment avoidance are highly associated with either a permissive or an authoritarian parenting style, according to a previous study by Millings et al. (2012). Low levels of responsive caregiving, which are avoidant and anxiety attachment and depict an individual as having trouble attending to the needs of others in a timely manner, were also highly associated with both authoritarian and permissive parenting styles. Therefore, this result is consistent with previous research by Millings et al. (2012), as the current result also demonstrates a strong positive relationship between attachment avoidance and permissive parenting style.

Findings show that whereas avoidance and anxiety attachment are strongly connected with authoritarian and permissive parenting styles, secure attachment persons were favorably correlated with authoritative parenting style (Millings et al., 2013). Furthermore, individuals with anxiety attachment may find it challenging to meet the requirements of an authoritative parenting style because their own attachment needs overwhelm them. This makes it challenging for them to be attentive, loving, and caring parents when they were never raised with this level of support or did not experience it during their childhood or marriage.

A prior research by Akhtar (2012), which examined the impact of parents' parenting methods on undergraduate students' attachment styles, the findings indicated a substantial correlation between students' anxious attachment types and authoritarian parenting approaches. Additionally, Ktistaki et al. (2014) discovered that spouses who experience anxiety and insecurity in their own romantic relationship—that is, who exhibit attachment anxiety—are likely not showing their children love and affection and are typically overly focused on punishing them without any justification.

Results also reveals that attachment avoidance and anxiety showed significant gender differences, with male students exhibiting more attachment avoidance and anxiety and female students exhibiting higher attachment anxiety. This aligns with the extant research (Alonso-Arbiol et al., 2007; Mikulincer – Shaver, 2007) as well as conventional assumptions in western folk psychology. The gender disparities in our study were supported by a meta-analysis of 100 studies using attachment type variables (Del Giudice, 2011).

## CONCLUSIONS

The present study found a significant correlation between parenting styles and adult attachment styles, supporting the notion that early childhood experiences influence how we form intimate relationships. Interestingly, our findings revealed that females tend to score higher in anxious attachment, while males exhibited more avoidance anxiety. These results have significant implications for various fields, including clinical psychology by informing interventions to address insecure attachment patterns, and educational psychology by highlighting the importance of fostering secure attachment styles in children. Some implications of the study are the following:

- **i. Relationship satisfaction:** Positive and supportive parenting styles, such as authoritative parenting, tend to promote secure attachment and healthier relationship dynamics.
- **ii. Communication and conflict resolution:** Parenting styles that prioritize open communication and encourage healthy conflict resolution strategies can contribute to better communication skills and problem-solving abilities within romantic relationships.
- **iii. Emotional well-being:** Secure attachment styles, which are often fostered by nurturing and responsive parenting, are associated with higher levels of emotional well-being and self-esteem. In contrast, insecure attachment styles resulting from less supportive parenting may contribute to lower self-esteem and emotional distress within relationships.
- **iv. Parenting practices:** Individuals who have experienced positive parenting styles are more likely to adopt similar parenting practices with their own children. This can create a

positive cycle, as secure attachment and healthy relationship dynamics are passed down through generations.

v. Inter-generational patterns: Unresolved attachment issues from childhood can impact future generations. Understanding the implications of parenting styles and attachment dynamics can help break negative inter-generational patterns and promote healthier relationships within families.

## Limitations and suggestions for future researchers.

The present study concludes the following suggestions to improve the current study. Therefore, if this study is replicated somewhere, these points should be kept in consideration.

- **i. Cross-Sequential or Cohort-Sequential** research can be conducted to study the long-term effects of different parenting styles on attachment dynamics within couples' intimate relationships. This would provide a deeper understanding of the topic within a given period of time.
- **ii. Cross-cultural study** can also explore that how parenting styles and attachment dynamics may vary across different cultures by investigating the influence of cultural values, norms and societal factors on parenting behavior and their impact on attachment styles.
- **iii. Intervention programs:** Develop and evaluate intervention programs aimed at promoting positive parenting styles and enhancing secure attachment in couples. These programs could provide guidance and support to parents in developing healthy attachment relationships with their children, which may in turn positively impact their own romantic relationships.
- **iv. Mediating factors:** Investigate the mediating factors or personal attributes that link parenting styles and ongoing attachment styles. For example, explore the role of self-esteem, communication patterns, and conflict resolution strategies in the relationship between parenting styles and attachment dynamics.

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