

# Adult Attachment Styles, Fear of Intimacy and Relationship Satisfaction among Indian Young Adults

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Previous literature has given significant insights into how insecure attachment styles which include attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance affect relationship satisfaction. Higher attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance higher would-be Fear of Intimacy which lead to decreased relationship satisfaction. The present study investigated the relationship between insecure adult attachment styles, fear of intimacy, and relationship satisfaction in 200 Indian adults in the age group 18 to 25 who are currently in romantic relationships. Data was analyzed using correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis. The correlational analysis revealed significant relationships among the variables. Multiple regression analysis revealed significant results where fear of intimacy influenced relationship satisfaction. These findings suggest that insecure adult attachment, fear of intimacy, and relationship satisfaction are related and fear of intimacy predicts relationship satisfaction.

*Keywords:* attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, fear of intimacy, relationship satisfaction

## Adult Attachment Styles

Adult attachment styles, rooted in early childhood experiences with caregivers, profoundly influence how individuals form and maintain relationships throughout their lives. According to attachment theory developed by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth, the quality of one's early attachment relationships serves as a template for future interpersonal interactions and bonds (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth et al., 1978). There are three primary adult attachment styles: secure, anxious-preoccupied, and dismissive-avoidant (Bartholomew, 1990). Securely attached individuals exhibit comfort with intimacy and effectively balance dependence and independence within relationships. Conversely, those with anxious-preoccupied or dismissive-avoidant styles may encounter challenges with intimacy stemming from fears of rejection or abandonment (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). Research consistently indicates that one's attachment style serves as a direct predictor of relational happiness and success (Timm & Keiley, 2011).

Adult attachment styles are closely linked to emotional regulation, with securely attached individuals being better equipped to manage their emotions and respond to emotional stimuli (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010). On the other hand, individuals with anxious or avoidant attachment styles might face difficulties in managing their emotions, resulting in heightened stress and anxiety within relationships. Attachment style also plays a crucial role in conflict resolution, with people with secure attachment They tend to lean

towards employing beneficial conflict resolution techniques more frequently and avoid destructive conflict behaviours. In contrast, those with attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance may engage in more destructive conflict behaviours, such as avoidance or aggression, which can damage relationships. Understanding the role of attachment style in conflict resolution is essential for developing effective relationship skills and promoting relationship satisfaction. Attachment style is also closely linked to intimacy, with securely attached individuals being more comfortable with emotional and physical intimacy (Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998). In contrast, people with attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance may have problems with intimacy due to fears of rejection or abandonment (Hatfield, 1984). Studies have demonstrated that attachment style can influence intimacy, where individuals with a secure attachment are more inclined to participate in intimate behaviours and experience greater intimacy satisfaction (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Rovine, 2005).

Thus, through these factors, attachment styles, which are formed in early childhood, have been shown to significantly influence adult relationships (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Securely attached individuals exhibit ease with intimacy and possess the ability to maintain a healthy equilibrium between reliance and autonomy within relationships (Bowlby, 1969). Conversely, individuals with anxious or avoidant attachment styles may find intimacy challenging because of their apprehension about being rejected or abandoned (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). Research has consistently shown that attachment style directly correlates with the level of happiness and success in relationships (Timm & Keiley, 2011).

## Fear of Intimacy

Fear of intimacy, often referred to as avoidance anxiety or intimacy avoidance, is a type of relationship apprehension stemming from the reluctance to establish a deeply intimate emotional or physical bond (Hatfield, 1984). It describes the restricted ability to share thoughts and emotions of personal importance with a deeply valued individual (Descutner & Thelen, 1991). Individuals experiencing intimacy issues often find it challenging to form emotional bonds

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and establish deeper connections. This apprehension can arise from diverse factors, such as childhood trauma like abuse or neglect, and can encompass various forms of intimacy, including intellectual, emotional, sexual, experiential, and spiritual connections (Descutner & Thelen, 1991). Conquering this fear and anxiety requires a considerable amount of time, involving both the exploration and comprehension of underlying factors contributing to it, as well as the gradual practice of becoming more comfortable with vulnerability. (Manbeck, 2019).

Fear of intimacy is closely linked to emotional avoidance, with individuals who fear intimacy often avoiding emotional experiences and intimacy due to fears of rejection or abandonment (Hatfield, 1984). Studies indicate that fear of intimacy correlates with emotional avoidance, as individuals who experience this fear tend to steer clear of emotional encounters and intimacy (Manbeck, 2019). Understanding fear of intimacy and its role in emotional avoidance is essential for developing effective interventions to promote intimacy and relationship satisfaction. This fear can manifest in various forms, including fears of exposure, attacks, abandonment, or rejection (Reis, 2018). Research has demonstrated that increased levels of attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety are linked to diminished satisfaction in romantic relationships (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998; Laurenceau, Barrett, & Rovine, 2005).

Fear of intimacy is also strongly associated with attachment style, with individuals who fear intimacy often having anxious or avoidant attachment styles (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). Research has shown that attachment style can influence fear of intimacy, with securely attached individuals being less likely to fear intimacy and more likely to engage in intimate behaviours (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Rovine, 2005). Fear of intimacy can have a significant impact on relationship satisfaction, with individuals who fear intimacy often experiencing lower relationship satisfaction and greater relationship distress (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998). Research has shown that fear of intimacy is linked with lower relationship satisfaction, with individuals who fear intimacy being more likely to experience relationship dissatisfaction and distress (Manbeck, 2019).

## Relationship Satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction is a multifaceted concept that encompasses various aspects of a romantic relationship, including communication, conflict resolution, and emotional intimacy (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998). Research has shown that relationship satisfaction is influenced by various factors, including attachment style, fear of intimacy, and communication patterns (Reis, 2018). Understanding the significance of emotional intelligence in determining the level of satisfaction within relationships is essential for developing effective relationship skills and promoting relationship satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction is closely linked to communication, with effective communication being a key predictor of relationship satisfaction. Research has shown that communication patterns, such as active listening and constructive conflict resolution, are associated with higher relationship satisfaction (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998). Understanding the role of communication in relationship satisfaction is essential for developing effective relationship skills and promoting relationship satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction is also closely linked to intimacy, with intimacy being a key predictor

of relationship satisfaction (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Rovine, 2005). Research has shown that intimacy, including emotional and physical intimacy, is associated with higher relationship satisfaction (Manbeck, 2019). Exploring the significance of intimacy in determining satisfaction within relationships is essential for developing effective interventions to promote intimacy and relationship satisfaction.

Relationship satisfaction is closely linked to adult attachment, where individuals with secure attachment have a greater probability of experiencing higher relationship satisfaction (Gardner, 2007). Research has consistently shown that attachment style is a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction, with securely attached individuals being more likely to report higher levels of relationship satisfaction and lower levels of relationship dissatisfaction (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Feeney & Noller, 1990).

## *The Present Study*

The present study examines the relationship between insecure adult attachment style, fear of intimacy, and relationship satisfaction. The study also examines the influence of attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, and fear of intimacy on relationship satisfaction. Attachment theory suggests that early experiences with caregivers shape our capacity for intimacy and influence the way we form and maintain relationships throughout our lives. The fear of intimacy can lead to barriers to forming close connections with others. This fear can manifest in various attachment styles. The exploration into the dynamics of attachment types and fear of intimacy can shed light on their impact on relationship satisfaction. By understanding individual attachment styles and how they can influence fear of intimacy and relationship satisfaction, one can gain insights into how they affect overall satisfaction in romantic relationships.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants in the sample are unmarried individuals from all across India who are currently in close romantic relationships and range in age from 18 to 25. Convenience sampling technique was used to collect data. 63 males and 137 females hailing from the states of Kerala and Karnataka participated in the study. Data was collected through Google Forms, which was across various online social platforms. No credit was given to the participants on the completion of the questionnaire.

### *Measures*

*Revised Adult Attachment Scale:* The Relationship Attachment Assessment Scale (RAAS), introduced by Nancy L. Collins in 1996, is an 18-item self-assessment tool designed to evaluate adult attachment in relationships. It consists of three main dimensions: comfort with closeness, comfort with dependence, and anxiety related to abandonment or feeling unloved. Alternatively, the scoring can be simplified into two dimensions: attachment anxiety (6 items) and attachment avoidance (12 items). Each dimension comprises six items, rated on a six-point scale from 1 (*not characteristic of me*) to 5 (*very characteristic of me*). In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for reliability was found to be .717.

*Fear of Intimacy Scale:* The Fear of Intimacy Scale (FIS), developed by Descutner and Thelen in 1991, is a self-assessment tool

consisting of 35 items. It aims to evaluate fear of intimacy, which is described as the inhibited ability of an individual, due to anxiety, to share thoughts and feelings of personal significance with a deeply valued other. The FIS operates on the premise that true intimacy is achieved through the exchange of personal information accompanied by strong emotions and a high regard for the other person. Responses are recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not characteristic of me*) to 5 (*extremely characteristic of me*). In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for reliability was determined to be .706.

**Relationship Assessment Scale:** The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), developed by Hendrick, is a seven-item Likert scale designed to measure overall satisfaction in relationships. Originally intended for married couples, revisions have expanded its applicability to individuals in various intimate relationship dynamics such as dating, cohabiting, and engaged couples, while still ensuring strong internal consistency. Respondents rate items on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating low satisfaction and 5 indicating high satisfaction. In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for reliability was found to be .527.

**Statistical Analysis**

The statistical analysis used in the study would be correlational and multiple regression analysis. A correlation analysis was performed to

measure the strength and direction of connections among these factors. This included calculating the Pearson correlation coefficient (*r*) to evaluate the extent of linear relationships between attachment style, fear of intimacy, and relationship satisfaction. Subsequently, multiple regression analysis was employed to identify significant predictors of relationship satisfaction, considering adult attachment style which has two dimensions, attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance and fear of intimacy as potential independent variables. This approach allows for the selection of variables that contribute to predicting relationship satisfaction, based on predetermined statistical criteria.

**Procedure**

The study utilized a survey approach for data collection, employing convenience sampling methods. Questionnaires were distributed online via platforms like email, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn using Google Forms. Participants received information about the study and provided informed consent before participation, with the assurance of voluntary involvement and the ability to withdraw without consequences. Socio-demographic information such as age, gender, residence, family structure, education, employment, and socioeconomic status was gathered. Contact details of the researcher were provided for any inquiries. Table 1 presents the socio-demographic details of the sample.

**Table 1**  
*Socio-demographic Details of the Sample*

Socio-demographic Details		No: of Participants	%
Age	18-21	63	31.5%
	22-25	137	68.5%
Gender	Male	63	31.5%
	Female	137	68.5%
Place of Residence	Urban	107	53.5%
	Sub-Urban	58	29.0%
	Rural	35	17.5%
Family Type	Nuclear	169	84.5%
	Joint	31	15.5%
Educational Qualification	Under-graduate	121	60.5%
	Postgraduate	79	39.5%
Employment Status	Employed	46	23.0%
	Unemployed	122	61.0%
	Working as Part-time	32	16.0%
Socio-economic Status	Upper Class	5	2.5%
	Upper Middle Class	73	36.5%
	Lower Middle Class	97	48.5%
	Upper Lower Class	16	8.0%
	Lower Class	9	4.5%

**Results**

**Bivariate Correlations**

**Table 2**

*Bivariate Correlations Between AN, AV, FIS, RS*

Parameters	AN	AV	FIS	RS
AN	1			

AV	.496**	1		
FIS	.314**	.332**	1	
RS	-.279**	-.232**	-.606**	1

*Note.* \*\**p*<0.01; AN- Attachment Anxiety, AV- Attachment Avoidance, FIS- Fear of intimacy, RS- Relationship Satisfaction.

Table 2 shows the Pearson correlation coefficients of Attachment Anxiety (AN), Attachment Avoidance (AV), Fear of intimacy (FIS), and Relationship Satisfaction (RS). Attachment Anxiety and

Attachment Avoidance moderate positive correlation ( $r= 0.496$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). In between Attachment Anxiety and Fear of intimacy, there is a weak positive correlation ( $r= 0.314$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Attachment Anxiety and Relationship Satisfaction has a negative weak correlation ( $r= -0.279$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Attachment Avoidance has a weak positive correlation with Fear of Intimacy. ( $r= 0.332$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and negative weak correlation with relationship

satisfaction ( $r= -0.232$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Fear of intimacy has a negative moderate correlation with Relationship satisfaction ( $r=-0.606$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

### *Predictors of Relationship Satisfaction*

Multiple regression analysis was employed to understand the prediction of RS by AN, AV and FIS.

**Table 3**  
*A Summary of the Multiple Regression Analysis of AN and FIS*

Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Change Statistics		
				R Square Change	F Change	Sig. F Change
FIS, AN, AV	.613	.376	.366	.376	39.318	<0.01

**Table 4**  
*Coefficients of the Multiple Regression Analysis*

Coefficients					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	40.707	2.201		18.497	<0.01
AN	-.110	.070	-.104	-1.571	.118
AV	.011	.070	.011	.163	.871
FIS	-.149	.016	-.577	-9.475	<0.01

*Note.* Dependent Variable - Relationship Satisfaction (RS), \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; FIS- Fear of Intimacy; AN- Attachment Anxiety, AV- Attachment Avoidance

Table 3 shows the modal summary of multiple regression analysis where the predictor variables are attachment anxiety (AN), attachment avoidance (AV), and fear of intimacy (FIS) and the dependent variable is satisfaction (RS). The model summary provides insight into the overall fit of the model. The correlation coefficient (R) shows a moderate positive association between the predictors and the dependent variable, with a value of 0.613. The coefficient of determination (R Square) indicates that about 37.6% of the variance in the dependent variable can be accounted for by the predictors. However, the Adjusted R Square suggests that the inclusion of additional predictors does not significantly enhance the model's explanatory capacity, as it remains nearly identical to R Square.

Coming into the coefficients which are represented in Table 4, the intercept (Constant) signifies the predicted value of the dependent variable when all predictors are zero, standing at 40.707. While Attachment Anxiety (AN) exhibits a negative unstandardized coefficient (-0.110), suggesting a decrease in the dependent variable with increasing AN, it fails to achieve statistical significance ( $p = 0.118$ ). Similarly, Attachment Avoidance (AV) displays a negligible positive coefficient (0.011) and lacks statistical significance ( $p = 0.871$ ). Conversely, Fear of Intimacy (FIS) emerges as a crucial predictor, wielding a significant negative coefficient (-0.149). This indicates that as FIS escalates by one unit, the dependent variable

decreases by 0.149 units. With a p-value below 0.01, FIS demonstrates statistical significance, implying its substantial influence on the dependent variable.

Therefore, Attachment Anxiety and Attachment Avoidance show non-significant associations with the dependent variable which is Relationship Satisfaction, Fear of Intimacy emerges as a pivotal predictor in the model. Thus, Fear of intimacy influences relationship satisfaction.

### Discussion

The present study aimed at analysing the relationship between insecure adult attachment styles, fear of intimacy, and relationship satisfaction. The results of bivariate correlations yielded significant results where Attachment Anxiety and Attachment Avoidance exhibit a moderate positive correlation, while Attachment Anxiety demonstrates a weak positive correlation with Fear of Intimacy. Conversely, Attachment Anxiety correlates negatively, albeit weakly, with Relationship Satisfaction. Attachment Avoidance displays a weak positive correlation with Fear of Intimacy and a weak negative correlation with Relationship Satisfaction. Fear of Intimacy is negatively correlated with Relationship Satisfaction, showing a moderate strength of association. Multiple regression analysis was employed to analyse the influence of attachment styles, and fear of intimacy on relationship satisfaction. The model

summary indicates a moderate positive relationship ( $R = 0.613$ ) between the predictors and RS, with approximately 37.6% of the variance explained (R Square). Nevertheless, the Adjusted R Square indicates that the additional predictors offer only minimal additional explanatory capability. The intercept, or constant term, is recorded as 40.707. Although AN exhibit a negative coefficient, it lacks statistical significance ( $p = 0.118$ ). Similarly, AV's coefficient is minimal and statistically insignificant ( $p = 0.871$ ). Conversely, FIS displays a significant negative coefficient ( $p < 0.01$ ), indicating its considerable impact on RS.

Fricker and Moore (2002) proposed that individuals with secure attachment tend to experience greater levels of both relationship and sexual satisfaction, whereas those with anxious and avoidant attachment styles typically report lower levels of satisfaction (Fricker & Moore, 2002). Similarly, Ayenew (2016) indicated that heightened levels of attachment anxiety and avoidance are associated with diminished relationship satisfaction among couples, as evidenced by the negative correlations between attachment anxiety and avoidance and relationship satisfaction (Ayenew, 2016).

When it comes to attachment style and fear of intimacy, research suggests, that both anxiety and avoidance are negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction, indicating that higher levels of attachment insecurity are associated with lower satisfaction levels for both individuals and their partners. Anxious individuals tend to over think their partner's behaviours and constantly fear abandonment, leading to negative responses from their partners and diminished satisfaction. Avoidant individuals, on the other hand, tend to avoid intimacy and commitment, which can result in distancing behaviours and reduced emotional support, ultimately leading to lower satisfaction for both partners (Candel, 2019).

Although previous researches suggested attachment styles successfully predicted satisfaction, where either partner experienced significant anxiety about abandonment or discomfort with closeness, both individuals in the relationship were notably unhappy (Jones & Cunningham, 1996) the present study couldn't establish the prediction of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance on relationship satisfaction. This might be due to the fact that feeling anxious about relationships made people think their partners wanted them to manage their sadness and anger, and this connection between insecure attachment and controlling negative emotions remained strong even after considering how often these emotions were experienced (Feeney, 1995). Other possible reasons that can have been thought off include Participants being reluctant to admit to feelings of anxiety or avoidance due to social norms or fear of being judged thereby admitting something other than what they feel. This might also be due to fear of intimacy where they are hesitant to express their true feelings or desires for fear of being rejected or hurt, leading to under-reporting of attachment anxiety and avoidance. There can be also chances that participants may have been defensive about their relationships or attachment styles, leading to denial or minimization of attachment anxiety and avoidance and they may not have been aware of their attachment styles or feelings, making it difficult to accurately report on attachment anxiety and avoidance.

Previous research suggests that fear of intimacy negatively affects relationship satisfaction (Sobral, Teixeira, & Costa, 2015). Another research indicates that when wives exhibit elevated degrees of self-differentiation, they tend to have Reduced levels of fear of intimacy corresponds to increased levels of relationship satisfaction, as

reported by husbands. In contrast, husbands' fear of intimacy does not seem to impact relationship satisfaction. These results align with Bowen's theoretical framework, suggesting that self-differentiation reflects one's capacity for intimacy, which ultimately influences the satisfaction levels within a couple's relationship (Finzi-Dottan, 2023). In marriage, as anticipated, both the presence of intimacy and fear of intimacy showed significant associations with marital satisfaction. Furthermore, wanting more intimacy than what is currently received from one's partner was linked to decreased marital satisfaction (Brunn, 2002). Fear of intimacy is positively correlated within couples and has a negative effect on both men's and women's actual and desired intimacy. It emphasizes the importance of compatibility in fear of intimacy levels for the success of relationships. Notably, women's fear of intimacy is particularly influential in determining relationship longevity, with women being more inclined to terminate relationships when experiencing a heightened fear of intimacy (Thelen et al., 2000). Thus, fear of intimacy plays a significant role when it comes to relationship satisfaction wherein it influences couple satisfaction.

Thus, attachment avoidance, attachment anxiety, and fear of intimacy are psychological constructs that play a crucial role in shaping individuals' relationships and overall satisfaction in their intimate partnerships. Individuals high in attachment avoidance tend to have a dismissive attitude towards relationships and are more likely to avoid emotional closeness and intimacy. They often have a fear of being dependent on others and prefer independence and self-reliance. Alternatively, individuals exhibiting high levels of attachment anxiety are preoccupied with fears of rejection and abandonment. They have a strong desire for intimacy and closeness but may also experience chronic anxiety about their partners not meeting their needs. These attachment styles have been discovered to exhibit a negative correlation with relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, fear of intimacy has been recognized as a substantial predictor of satisfaction within relationships. This means that individuals who have a fear of intimacy are more likely to experience lower levels of satisfaction in their relationships.

## Limitations of the Study

Limitations of the study on attachment styles and relationship satisfaction include a restricted sample of young adults in India within the age range 18-25, a cross-sectional design limiting causal inferences, reliance on self-report measures which paves the way for social desirability, lack of various analysis to fully explore partner effects, failure to consider potential confounding factors like communication patterns or external stressors, limited assessment of fear of intimacy's specific impact on relationship satisfaction, and the need for broader cultural considerations beyond Indian contexts. Addressing these limitations through more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, objective measures, dyadic analyses, and comprehensive control of confounding variables would enhance the study's validity and provide a more nuanced understanding of how attachment styles influence relationship satisfaction across different cultural and relational contexts.

## Suggestions for future research

Future research in the field of adult attachment styles and relationship satisfaction could benefit from longitudinal studies to track changes over time, dyadic analyses to explore partner effects,

consideration of cultural influences, intervention studies to test practical applications, examination of neurobiological and physiological aspects, comparative studies across diverse populations, and investigations into attachment's role in various relationship stages. By addressing these areas, researchers can deepen their understanding of how attachment styles impact relationship satisfaction, leading to more comprehensive insights and potentially more effective interventions to enhance romantic relationships across different contexts and stages.

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