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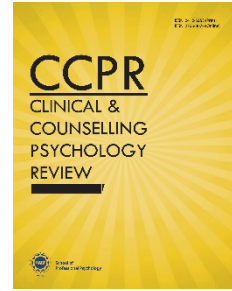
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# Childhood Attachment with Parents as Predictor of Subjective Wellbeing in Emerging Adults

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## Abstract

The current study was intended to explore the dynamics of attachment relationships with the caregivers formed during childhood and the influence of this attachment on the well-being of the emerging adults. It was hypothesized that insecure (avoidant & anxious) attachment style with mother/father is negatively correlated with subjective well-being among emerging adults (18-25 years old). Furthermore, insecure attachment (avoidant & anxious) with mother/father in childhood predicts decreased subjective well-being in emerging adults. The sample comprised  $N = 403$  undergraduate students, aged 18-25 years, from a public sector university. Experiences in Close Relationships- Relations Structure was used to assess the attachment insecurity of the adult with his/her mother and father both. Subjective well-being was measured using three scales: Satisfaction with Life Scale, Positive Affect Negative Affect Scale, and Flourishing Scale. The regression analyses showed that subjective well-being was significantly predicted by insecure attachment.

**Keywords:** attachment insecurity, emerging adulthood, subjective well-being

## Introduction

Attachment is one of the many important factors often discussed in relation to the healthy functioning of an individual. Bowlby (1969) has done extensive work in this regard and he defines attachment as an emotional bond between a child and parents or any other caregiver. Ainsworth (1973, p.23) postulates that ‘attachment is an affectional tie that one person forms to another specific person - binding them together and enduring over time’.

A child is born in an alien world that is cold as opposed to the warmth and protection of the womb he previously inhabited. As opposed to ancient beliefs, nourishment and satiation of hunger are not the reasons the child seeks out its caregiver. Protection, support, warmth, and nurturance are

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equally important and sought after by the newborn (Sethna et al., [2017](#)). As the child begins to explore his environment, he/she does not let go of the base, the caregiver, to which he/she returns when needed. But if the base is not secure or nurturing enough, it leaves the child feeling exposed to harm and danger (Ainsworth, [1973](#)).

The kind of attachment a child has with the caregiver bases the foundation for different attachment styles. Attachment style refers to the relational behavior, affect, and cognition that originate from a person's internalized past experiences related to attachment. The classification of attachment styles has come a long way. It started with Ainsworth's famous Strange Situation experiment which revealed secure and insecure attachment orientations namely secure, avoidant, resistant, and disoriented attachment styles. Secure attachment results from parents' responsiveness to the needs of the infant and their subsequent fulfillment. However, when parents behave inconsistently to the needs of their child and do not respond appropriately, it leads to the development of insecure attachment (Ainsworth et al., [1978](#)). George and Kaplan ([1985](#)) elaborated on the work and presented their own classification of attachment patterns; preoccupied, secure, dismissing, and unresolved. This classification was based on the quality of recall of the adults of their childhood experiences. Later, Hazan and Shaver ([1987](#)) studied Ainsworth's classification but in the context of adult romantic relationships and proposed three broad categories: secure, avoidant, and anxious-resistant. Lastly, Brennan et al. ([1998](#)) did factor analyses and came up with two major classifications of insecure attachment: avoidant and anxious based on the affective-motivational framework (Fraley & Shaver, [1997](#)) having two components. The first component deals with the appraisal of events in the light of attachment goals i.e. detection of threats or danger of being rejected. This may be manifested in attachment-related anxiety. The second component comprises of regulation of attachment behavior. It implies how the individual responds to a situation where the attachment goals are compromised. It may be manifested in the form of attachment-related avoidance. This framework by Fraley and Shaver ([1997](#)) has allowed several attachment classifications to be seen on a continuum where there is a difference in degrees and not in kind. Keeping in view the progression of the construct attachment across decades, the current study makes use of the dimensional measure of attachment to explain the construct on a continuum of security vs. insecurity.

In a nutshell, insecure attachment has two major domains: attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. Attachment anxiety refers to the pattern of behavior where the individual craves a close relationship and at the same time fears being rejected by or separated from loved ones. People with attachment anxiety express hyperactivating strategies. It involves increased sensitivity to threats in the environment, heightened negative emotional responses as well as view of self as incompetent and helpless. Such individuals, perpetually plagued with fear of abandonment, remain eager to minimize the distance from their loved ones. On the other hand, attachment avoidance entails a self-sufficient disposition where the individual seems to detest intimacy and closeness, hereby employing underactivating methods (Brennan et al., [1998](#)). They possess an inflated sense of self, dismissive attitude towards people, disregard love and intimacy and suppress their emotions (Mikulincer & Shaver, [2007](#)). Insecure attachment, either anxious or avoidant, is maladaptive. Conversely, people with secure attachments tend to seek out social support when distressed, maintain healthy interpersonal relationships, and have high self-esteem. They are good problem-solvers and make use of positive emotion regulation coping strategies (Mikulincer, [1998](#); Mikulincer & Shaver, [2003](#)).

The attachment styles developed in the formative years of an adult's life tend to have a profound influence on his perception of people around him, management of emotions, and close relationships (Bowlby, [1969](#)). They lead to a state of well-being. Subjective well-being means how an individual appraises and experiences life events. There are three ways to assess levels of subjective well-being. Firstly, evaluative well-being entails the judgment of the degree of satisfaction with life. Second is experience well-being which refers to the nature, intensity, and frequency of emotional experiences whether positive or negative. Finally, eudemonic well-being includes a sense of meaningfulness and purpose in life (Myers & Diener, [1995](#)).

The mechanisms behind the influence of early attachment patterns on later well-being are still being researched. It has been agreed upon that attachment patterns with primary caregivers tend to be more stable than those with other attachment figures (Fraley & Dugan, [2021](#)). Therefore, the stability of attachment patterns from childhood to adulthood rise a plethora of interesting queries in their wake. One of those resides in the implications of attachment security in an adult's life.

The temperamental traits, that are characteristic of attachment's influence in later life, have been highlighted as negative reactivity and experiencing positive affect (Belsky & Rovine, [1987](#)). Since, learning emotion regulation is one of the fundamental functions of the parent-child attachment relationship, the kind of attachment patterns an individual has developed, determines his/ her affective regulation (Bowlby, [1969](#)). Affective regulation is the flexibility to acknowledge and integrate positive and negative emotions. The system, influenced by parent-child attachment patterns, is internalized by the child and later manifested in other contexts (Cassidy, [1994](#)). Studies conducted to examine the relationship between attachment security and emotional understanding have revealed that individuals with secure attachment are better able to apprehend negative emotions as compared to those with insecure attachment (Laible & Thompson, [1998](#)), also they are more likely to recall positive events when primed in contrast to an insecure individual who emphasizes more upon negative events (Belsky et al., [1996](#)). Individuals with secure attachment experience positive affect across all social situations (Torquati & Raffaelli, [2004](#)), indicating that their emotional experience remains stable. Whereas, individuals with insecure attachment (particularly anxious attachment) tend to experience flighty, negative, and distressing emotions (Kafetsios & Nezlek, [2002](#)). Moreover, life satisfaction has been found to have a positive relationship with secure attachment patterns and a negative relationship with insecure attachment (Guarnieri et al., [2015](#); Ling et al., [2008](#); Sharon & Wendy, [2009](#); Van Buren & Cooley, [2002](#)). Decreased life satisfaction may be a result of inadequate conflict management and disturbed interpersonal relationships that are characteristic of people with insecure attachment (Roisman & Groh, [2021](#))

An important element of subjective well-being is a sense of purpose and meaning in life. It has been found that people with secure attachments possess increased meaningfulness (Hicks & King, [2009](#); Mikulincer & Shaver, [2005](#)). Insecure attachment is known to hinder goal setting, resource management, and goal attainment. Individuals who have an anxious attachment style remain restricted due to their crippling self-esteem and individuals with avoidant attachment styles play safe in order to not face defeat, hence they do not challenge themselves as much (Mikulincer & Shaver, [2007](#)). Therefore, insecurely attached individuals remain rooted owing to unfavorable self-views and fear of failure ultimately experiencing a scarcity of meaning in their lives. All in all, it can be said that the parent-

child relationship in the early years of life may have a lasting influence on the emotional experience, psychological well-being, and happiness of an individual in the subsequent years.

Since an individual's view of his relationship with his parent remains consistent from adolescence to adulthood (Rossi & Rossi, [1990](#)), a study conducted in this regard found an association between infantile attachment and maladjustment in adolescence (Lewis et al., [2000](#)). Furthermore, as attachment behavioral systems are universal and exist cross-culturally (Van IJzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, [2008](#)), a study conducted on Chinese undergraduates proposed an association between adult attachment orientations and subjective well-being as well (Li & Zheng, [2014](#)). A study intended to examine the differences in attachment patterns across different regions found attachment security to be lower among South Asians (e.g. India, Srilanka, Bangladesh) with the highest levels of attachment anxiety as a result of collectivist culture (Agishtein & Brumbaugh, [2013](#)). Imtiaz and Naqvi ([2012](#)) conducted a study in Pakistan to see the role of attachment style on the identity formation of adolescents with no mention of well-being. Another study explored attachment patterns with respect to parenting styles among Pakistani adolescents (Akhtar, [2012](#)). Khalid ([2014](#)) conducted a similar study to delve into parenting and consequent attachment patterns of the young adolescent. As can be seen, there is a scarcity of literature regarding the influence of attachment on the subjective well-being of Pakistani emerging adults. Thompson et al. ([2022](#)), in their extensive published inquiry, prompt researchers to conduct research to explore the implications of attachment security on different behavioral domains to yield complicated but interesting perspectives.

The current study is conducted to assess the association between childhood experiences of attachment with the parents and subjective well-being in adulthood.

## **Objectives**

There are two objectives for the present study. The first is to check whether insecure (avoidant & anxious) attachment style with mother/father is negatively related to constructs of subjective well-being among emerging adults. The second objective is to examine whether insecure attachment (avoidant and anxious) with mother/father in childhood predicts decreased subjective well-being in adulthood among emerging adults.

## Method

### Research design

It is an exploratory study that examines the relationship between attachment orientations formed in early childhood and subjective well-being in emerging adulthood. The current study is retrospective in nature since the participants were asked to report their childhood attachment experiences with each parent. In this way, the attachment orientation of emerging adults with each parent was explored in relation to their perceived life satisfaction, emotional experiences, and psychological well-being.

### Participants

Four hundred and three students were selected from the University of Karachi via convenient sampling technique. Around 85% of the sample comprised female students aged between 18-25 years. They belonged to different academic disciplines such as social sciences and natural sciences, arts, humanities, etc.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Characteristics of the Sample*

Variables	Percentage (%)
Age (Years)	
18-20	29
21-23	56.3
24-26	14
Gender	
Male	15
Female	85
Qualification	
Social Sciences	60
Medicine	35.2
Business	4.5

As presented, a huge chunk of the sample comprised female participants. The majority of the participants were 21-23 years old. Moreover, most participants belonged to the discipline of social sciences.

## **Assessment Measures**

### ***Self-developed Demographic Questionnaire***

Participants were asked their gender, age, and qualification in a self-developed demographic questionnaire.

### ***Experiences in Close Relationships - Relations Structure (ECR-RS)***

ECR-RS was used to assess offspring's attachment to parents. It is a 9-item scale using the 1-7 point scale to measure attachment security dimensionally. 1 indicates *strong disagreement* and 7 refers to *strong agreement*. Six items measure attachment avoidance and the remaining evaluate attachment-related anxiety. Test-retest reliability for measurement of attachment with the parent is .80. It also relates well with relational outcomes (Fraley et al., [2011](#)). Such two-dimensional assessment captures similar attachment patterns as the original classification system but it represents a greater degree of specificity than is ever possible in the classification system. The general misperception regarding ECR-RS is that it does not measure security, since security is a combination of both dimensions i.e. anxiety and avoidance. This would mean that a secure individual does not worry about the availability of an attachment figure (low anxiety) and feels comfortable using others as a secure base (low avoidance).

To measure subjective well-being, three scales were employed.

### ***Satisfaction with Life scale (SWLS)***

SWLS (Deiner et al., [1985](#)) is a 5-item scale designed to measure global cognitive judgments of one's life satisfaction. Participants mention to what extent they agree or disagree with each of the 5 items using a Likert scale. It has 0.87 test-retest reliability. The scoring of the scale is fairly simple where the score on each item is added to get a total. A score of 5 indicates extreme dissatisfaction and a score of 35 indicates extreme satisfaction with life.



### ***Positive Affect and Negative Affect scale (PANAS)***

PANAS (Watson et al., [1988](#)) is a 20-item scale designed with 10 items measuring positive affect and 10 measurements negative affect. It uses a 5-point scale (1 = *very slightly* or not at all, 5 = *extremely*) to indicate the extent of generally feeling the respective mood state. The reliability of the positive affect scale ranges from .86 to .90 and for the negative affect scale it is found to be .84 to .87. The scores on items 1, 3, 5, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17, and 19 are added to get a total of positive affect. Meanwhile items 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13, 15, 18, and 20 represent negative affect. Scores can range from 10-50.

### ***Flourishing Scale (FS)***

Flourishing scale (Diener et al., [2009](#)) was used to assess psychological well-being (eudemonic well-being). It comprises 8 items on a 7-point Likert scale. The scores range from 8 (low PWB) to 56 (high PWB). The scale assesses an individual's perception of success in relationships, self-esteem, purpose, and hopefulness. It has the reliability of Cronbach alpha .85.

### **Procedure**

Permission to use Experiences in Close Relationships-Relations Structure, Satisfaction with Life Scale, Positive Affect Negative Affect Scale & Flourishing Scale were acquired from test developers. A demographic questionnaire was developed. The scales were translated into Urdu to facilitate the understanding of the test takers. Moreover, the items of ECR-RS were turned into past tense to make inquiries about experiences of childhood pertaining to the parent-child relationship. For this purpose, a team of data collectors was trained. They approached undergraduate students within university premises and gained their consent to participate in the study. The self-report measures were administered to each participant individually. The scores were analyzed via SPSS.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Participants had the right to withdraw from the study upon their will. Any emotional harm caused was unintentional. Keeping in view the language barrier, the scale was translated. Data forms were scored, separated from the informed consent forms, and stored separately. Identifying information was not sought. Each participant was allotted a research ID to ensure confidentiality. Participants were provided with a

written consent form as well as a brief, verbal description prior to data collection.

## Results

**Table 2**

*Correlation Among Attachment Anxiety and Attachment Avoidance (with Mother and Father) and Subjective Well-Being*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.PWB	-							
2.SWLS	.52**	-						
3.NA	-.30**	-.36**	-					
4.PA	.44**	.31**	-.18**	-				
5.AA <sup>a</sup> with father	-.19**	.30**	.17**	-.13**	-			
6.AA <sup>b</sup> with father	-.25**	-.28**	.24**	-.10**	.44**	-		
7.AA <sup>a</sup> with mother	-.29**	-.24**	.18**	-.15**	.53**	.27**	-	
8.AA <sup>b</sup> with mother	-.20**	-.16**	.08	.08	.20**	.39**	.33**	-

*Note.* PWB = Psychological well-being, SWLS = satisfaction with life scale, NA = negative affect, PA = positive affect, AA<sup>a</sup> = attachment anxiety, AA<sup>b</sup> = attachment avoidance.

As can be seen in the table above, an emerging adult's attachment anxiety with the mother shares a significant negative relationship with satisfaction with life satisfaction i.e.  $r(402) = -.16, p < 0.01$  and psychological well-being i.e.  $r = -.20, p < 0.01$ . Moreover, attachment avoidance has a significant negative relationship with positive affect i.e.  $r(402) = -.150, p < 0.05$ , negative affect  $r(402) = .18, p < 0.01$  as well as psychological well-being  $r(402) = -.25, p < 0.01$ , and a positive relationship with satisfaction with life  $r(402) = -.24, p < 0.01$ . When it comes to attachment anxiety of an emerging adult towards his father, significant negative relationship with positive affect  $r(402) = -.10, p < 0.05$ , satisfaction with life  $r(402) = -.28, p < 0.01$  and psychological well-being  $r = -.25, p < 0.01$ , and positive relationship with negative affect  $r(402) = .24, p < 0.01$  were observed. Lastly, emerging adults' attachment avoidance with

his/her father shares a negative relationship with positive affect  $r(402) = -.13, p < 0.01$ , satisfaction with life  $r(402) = -.30, p < 0.01$  and psychological well-being  $r(402) = -.19, p < 0.01$ ; and positive relationship with negative affect  $r(402) = .17, p < 0.01$ . It shows that the perceived attachment insecurity of the emerging adult towards his/her parents as a result of childhood experiences is significantly related to subjective well-being in adulthood.

**Table 3**

*The Predictive Value of Attachment Avoidance with Mother for Negative Affect, Positive Affect, Satisfaction with Life Scale & Psychological Well-Being*

Criterion variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$R^2$	$df_1$	$df_2$	<i>F</i>	Sig
Positive affect	-.54	.33	.03			3.08	.10
Negative affect	.76	.33	.07	4	398	8.14	.00
Satisfaction with life	-.44	.265	.13			14.8	.00
Psychological well-being	-1.37	-.23	.12			14.04	.00

Linear regression analyses in Table 3 revealed that attachment avoidance with mother in childhood predicts negative affect ( $R^2 = .07, F(4,398) = 8.143, p < 0.023$ ), satisfaction with life ( $R^2 = .13, F(4, 398) = 14.8, p < .092$ ) and psychological well-being ( $R^2 = 0.12, F(4, 398) = 14, p < .000$ ) of the emerging adult.

**Table 4**

*The Predictive Value of Attachment Anxiety with Mother for Negative Affect, Positive Affect, Satisfaction with Life Scale & Psychological Well-Being*

Criterion variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$R^2$	$df_1$	$df_2$	<i>F</i>	Sig
Positive Affect	-.08	.22	.03			3.08	.69
Negative Affect	-.22	.22	.07	4	398	8.14	.32
Satisfaction With Life	-.10	.17	.13			14.8	.57
Psychological Well-Being	-.27	.22	.12			14.04	.21

Regression analysis show that attachment anxiety with mother has a no significant relationship with positive affect ( $R^2 = .03, F(4, 398) = 3.08, p = .69$ ), negative affect ( $R^2 = .07, F(4, 398) = 8.14, p = .32$ ), satisfaction with life ( $R^2 = .13, F(4, 398) = 14.8, p = .57$ ) and psychological well-being ( $R^2 = 0.12, F(4, 398) = 14, p = .21$ ).

**Table 5**

*The Predictive Value of Attachment Avoidance with Father for Negative Affect, Positive Affect, Satisfaction with Life Scale & Psychological Well-Being*

Criterion variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>df</i> <sub>1</sub>	<i>df</i> <sub>2</sub>	<i>F</i>	Sig
Positive Affect	-.32	.32	.03			3.08	.31
Negative Affect	.08	.31	.07	4	398	8.14	.79
Satisfaction With Life	-.72	.25	.13			14.8	.00
Psychological Wellbeing	.11	.31	.12			14.04	.71

Next, attachment avoidance with the father appears to predict satisfaction with life ( $R^2 = .13$ ,  $F(4, 398) = 14.8$ ,  $p = .005$ ) of the adult as shown in Table 5. Moreover, it does not predict positive affect ( $R^2 = .03$ ,  $F(4, 398) = 3.08$ ,  $p = .31$ ), negative affect ( $R^2 = .07$ ,  $F(4, 398) = 8.14$ ,  $p = .79$ ), and psychological well-being ( $R^2 = .12$ ,  $F(4, 398) = 14.04$ ,  $p = .71$ ).

**Table 6**

*The Predictive Value of Attachment Anxiety with Father for Negative Affect, Positive Affect, Satisfaction with Life Scale & Psychological Well-Being*

Criterion variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>df</i> <sub>1</sub>	<i>df</i> <sub>2</sub>	<i>F</i>	Sig
Positive Affect	-.25	.33	.03			3.08	.44
Negative Affect	1.26	.33	.07	4	398	8.14	.00
Satisfaction With Life	-.81	.264	.13			14.8	.00
Psychological Wellbeing	-1.02	.33	.12			14.04	.00

Table 6 shows that attachment anxiety with the father seems to predict negative affect ( $R^2 = .07$ ,  $F(4, 398) = 8.143$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), satisfaction with life ( $R^2 = .13$ ,  $F(4, 398) = 14.8$ ,  $p = .002$ ) and psychological well-being ( $R^2 = .12$ ,  $F(4, 398) = 14$ ,  $p = .002$ ). However, attachment anxiety with the father does not appear to predict positive affect on the emerging adult i.e. ( $R^2 = .03$ ,  $F(4, 398) = 3.08$ ,  $p = .44$ ).

## Discussion

The current study aimed to understand the significance of attachment-related experiences with the parents during childhood on subjective well-being later in life. There have been studies presenting implications of attachment with parents on the physical, intellectual, social, and emotional

development of the child in the past (Crandall & Hobson, [1999](#)). It is of utmost importance to explore the factors that could play a substantial role in enhancing well-being in the lives of emerging adults (Deiner & Chan, [2011](#)). Previously, studies either focused on the role of the mother with respect to the attachment formation of the individuals and its subsequent impact (Brumariu & Kerns, [2013](#)) or did not distinguish between the maternal and paternal roles (Oldfield et al., [2016](#)). The current study assesses the influence of attachment security toward maternal and paternal figures both separately with respect to the subjective well-being of emerging adults.

The statistical analyses of the present study validated the previous findings by revealing that childhood experiences with the parents result in the development of attachment patterns in an individual. These attachment patterns have ties with the well-being of an individual in the later stages of life (see table 2 in the results section). Hence, the hypothesis of the current study is approved. Further analysis (refer to table 3-6 in the results section) revealed that insecure attachment insecurity toward mother and father negatively predicted the well-being of an emerging adult.

The continuity versus stability debate with respect to attachment orientations has been there for decades and continues to be inconclusive (McConnell & Moss, [2011](#)). The propositions of the current study hinge upon the postulation of stability of attachment orientations across the lifespan. As Bowlby ([1977](#)) aptly stated, “Whilst especially evident during early childhood, attachment behavior is held to characterize human beings from the cradle to the grave.” (pp. 129) Attachment, being an affective motivational framework, ensures survival and well-being by prompting the individual to seek proximity with a wiser, stronger and resourceful caregiver. As deduced from the literature and subsequently hypothesized, the conduct of the caregiver in the initial years has a profound impact on the life of the child as he grows old accompanied by either positive or negative self-image and emotion regulation strategies, ultimately well-being. Previous researches affirm the linear relationship among constructs of subjective well-being and attachment insecurity as well. Turkisher ([1994](#)) explored that adults having secure attachments have increased life satisfaction. Similar findings ensued when Shahrazad et al. ([2015](#)) targeted adolescents aged 18-21 years old to find out what contributed to their subjective well-being. It was revealed that adolescents having secure

attachment orientation were likely to be satisfied with their lives. Talking about the influence of attachment representations on emotional experience, it was seen that attachment insecurity was related to increased negative affect and decreased positive affect in response to routine interactions (Feeney, [1995](#)). The results of the current study corroborate with more recent studies in this regard (Barry et al., [2007](#); Wearden et al., [2005](#)). In reference to the sense of meaning in life, a study was conducted where participants reported an increased level of meaninglessness in response to priming cues of attachment insecurity (Mikulincer & Shaver, [2005](#)). An extension of the study was held where the researchers discovered that the potential threat to meaninglessness led to the increased need for intimacy and warmth (Mikulincer & Shaver, [2013](#)). The findings of the present study are in line with the previous studies where attachment security is found to be positively associated with constructs of subjective well-being.

Regression analyses (refer to Table 3-6) revealed that attachment avoidance with the mother predicts the extent to which an adult feels negative emotion, satisfaction with life, and psychological well. Moreover, attachment insecurity (both anxiety and avoidance) with the father leads to dissatisfaction with life, frequent negative emotions, and disturbed psychological well-being. Schwartz ([2012](#)) conducted a wide-scale study involving 1034 participants of diverse cultural backgrounds which revealed that a warm, close relationship with the parents led to greater satisfaction with life, meaning in life, and psychological well-being. When facing a stressor, people with insecure attachment experience lower levels of subjective well-being, meanwhile securely attached individuals remain unaffected by the stressor. That being said, in the current study it is found that insecure attachment i.e. avoidant attachment style is found in most of the population. To be more precise, Pakistani girls, since 85% of the sample comprised female participants aged 18-25 years, seem to exhibit avoidant dispositions towards parental figures and subsequently experience lower well-being in emerging adulthood. The findings corroborate with Bowlby's ([1953](#)) maternal deprivation hypothesis and also provide evidence for paternal deprivation as proposed by Biller and Kimpton ([1997](#)). The infant forms a secure attachment to the father (Cowan et al., [1992](#)) as he does to the mother although the nature of attachment towards both parents may be unique (Lamb, [1977](#)). Keeping in mind the relationship with the father, Stafford et al. ([2016](#)) conducted a study and discovered that the magnitude of paternal influence on well-being was greater than maternal influence. So

it seems that as per the findings of the present study, girls aged 18-25 do not feel secure in their relationship with both parents, which results in a negative influence on their well-being. Therefore, the current study highlights the importance of the role of mother and father both in the attachment formation of children in their nascent years of life. There was a time when a lot of research was focused on the maternal role in attachment development only (Brown et al., 2007). The current study offers evidence that the role of the father is equally important as that of a mother when it comes to affective functionality of the daughter (Pearce, 2009). However, the pathway, as to what connects attachment formed in childhood to well-being experienced during adulthood, is not clear.

Additionally, despite being significant, the small  $R^2$  values (refer to Table 3-6 in the results section) can be explained by the interplay of mediating variables. The literature review singled out emotion regulation as a key mediating variable in the relationship between attachment patterns in childhood and well-being/illness in adulthood. Attachment theory has been found to affect emotion regulation (Feeney, 1995). As expected, individuals who are the recipient of sensitive caregiving during childhood are found better at recognizing and classifying emotions (Steele et al., 2008), have better strategies to manage affect (Colle & Giudice, 2011), and have a greater capacity to understand emotions (Brumariu et al., 2012). On the other hand, anxious individuals report experiencing extreme emotions (Collins & Read, 1990) that fluctuate greatly (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). They are also very reactive as their reliance is on hyper-activating coping strategies to manage threats of security (Simpson et al., 1996). Individuals with an avoidant attachment style have inhibited expression of emotions causing interpersonal and social difficulties (Livesley, 1991). Therefore, dysfunctional emotion regulation leads to distress. The second key variable would be the inability to mentalize resulting from attaching insecurity based on childhood experiences of insensitive caregiving. Such incapacity to mentalize leads to low well-being in adulthood. Mentalization refers to the faculties of the individual to recognize the self as a coherent composition of mental states that is distinguishable from those of others. The person with functioning mentalization capacity is able to comprehend his and others' mental states accurately. It is proposed that an emotional tie with the caregiver leads to the development of affective regulatory strategy which aids the development of mentalization capacity in individuals (Fonagy & Luyten, 2018). The third possible mediating variable would be coping

strategies to deal with stress. Children not provided with warm, responsive caregiving do not perceive themselves as safe from dangers. The perceived threats to security are managed by having either an exaggerated or suppressed response to the threat. At any rate, the ability to perceive and deal with stress is impaired. The dysfunctional coping with stress may contribute to decreased subjective well-being (Komorowska-Pudło, [2016](#)). The fourth variable to be discussed is self-compassion or lack thereof in case of insecure attachment. Studies have revealed that people with avoidant and insecure attachments are not self-compassionate which leads to distress (Hankin et al., [2005](#)). It was proposed that such individuals could secure greater happiness and well-being if they treated themselves with kindness (Joeng et al., [2017](#)). Lastly, we have parents' well-being as an essential variable that impacts the well-being of the offspring. Studies have been conducted to explore the relationship and it was discovered that parental well-being has strong positive ties with children's well-being (Bornovalova et al., [2010](#); Casas et al., [2008](#)). All in all, affect regulation, self-compassion, coping with stress, mentalization and parental subjective well-being seem to have a probable mediating effect in the relationship between attachment security/insecurity in childhood and well-being in adulthood.

## Conclusion

The current study presents a significant relationship between attachment formation during childhood and subjective well-being in adulthood. It is concluded that attachment security with mother and father leads to subjective well-being in emerging adulthood. Key mediating variables are discussed: emotion regulation, mentalization, coping with stress, self-compassion, and parental well-being. Future studies should consider the following variables when probing into underlying mechanisms.

A secure parent-child relationship is instrumental for an individual to feel meaningful, well, and emotionally sound in the subsequent years. Detachment appears to be the root cause of all these psychological evils if one may say so. To be more precise, detachment from the secure base leaves the individual untethered in the complex, unpredictable world. The current study affirms the significance of attachment relationships formed in childhood on the well-being experienced in emerging adulthood. It provides subtle evidence of the continuity of attachment patterns from childhood to adulthood thereby laying precedence for further in-depth exploration of



factors contributing to well-being so that risk factors may be countered, and protective factors are promoted. This in no way assumes the stance that illness and well-being share a categorical relationship i.e. one cannot exist without the other being present. Rather, a dimensional approach is being modeled to reach an effective solution at a rapid pace.

The current investigation could have rendered more findings if the effect of attachment was studied from the lens of the interplay of mediating variables as discussed above. The pathway between attachment and well-being would have been clearer. Moreover, the sample was hardly diverse. More than half of the sample comprised female university students. It impedes the generalization of findings. The researchers are advised to include a wide range of participants and examine the construct of attachment and well-being along with key mediating variables highlighted through an extensive literature review.

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