

# The Relationship Between Attachment Styles and Lifestyle With Marital Satisfaction

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## Abstract

**Background:** Marital satisfaction is one of the deepest and the most basic human pleasures and should be established within the family environment; if not, couples might suffer emotionally. Several factors are involved, including attachment and lifestyle.

**Objectives:** The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between styles of attachment and lifestyle with marital satisfaction.

**Materials and Methods:** The population in this study included all of the Bandar Abbas oil refining (BAOR) company employees, for a total of 292 people (146 couples). They were selected by multistage random sampling. The enrich marital satisfaction scale was used to measure marital satisfaction, the Collins and read's revised adult attachment scale (RAAS) for adult attachment to determine attachment style, and the life style questionnaire (LSQ) for lifestyle. This research was a descriptive-correlative one, and for the data analysis, we used Pearson's correlation factor and multivariable regression.

**Results:** The results indicate that attachment style and lifestyle factors can predict marital satisfaction. There was also a meaningful negative relationship between insecure attachment avoidant and insecure attachment anxious-ambivalent styles and marital satisfaction. However, there was no meaningful relationship between secure attachment style and marital satisfaction.

**Conclusions:** The results showed that the early relationship within the family environment supports a certain attachment style and the effects of the avoidant insecure and ambivalent insecure styles affect the interpersonal relations of the couples in adulthood. The effect of attachment styles on interpersonal relations is far greater than that of lifestyle.

**Keywords:** Attachment, Secure, Avoidant, Anxious-Ambivalent Attachment Styles, Marital Satisfaction, Lifestyle

## 1. Background

Marital satisfaction is one of the deepest and most basic human pleasures and should be established within the family environment; if not, couples might suffer emotionally if they quarrel or have conflict. As a result, the mental health of all family members may be threatened. Marital dissatisfaction can thus affect the lives of all family members. In fact, marriage and divorce are not merely personal, but also collective matters (1). As such, satisfaction and love are considered important aspects of the family environment. Marital satisfaction is defined as the pleasure derived from being aware of a comfortable situation, usually tied with satisfaction with specific marital desires. Couples experience marital satisfaction due to directional conscious feelings, such as friendship, and rational efforts. Satisfaction is an acquired mood, which is acquired through social interactions and the development of mental states relative to other individuals (1). Marital satisfaction refers to how much a couple loves each other. It also refers to a positive attitude toward married life. Satisfaction denotes an attitude variable; as a result, it is considered one personal characteristic of a couple. Hawkins (2004) defined marital satisfaction as

“subjective feelings of happiness, satisfaction and pleasure experienced by the couple when all aspects of their marriage are considered” (2).

Some have endeavored to answer the following question: How can an individual's early experiences in childhood affect him/her in adulthood? (3). Although theorists have begun to examine the similarities between attachment theory and individual psychology, the major area of convergence between the two theories is that both acknowledge the importance of social interaction for the expression of these patterns (4).

An attachment style refers to the relational behaviors that occur between the individuals and their primary caregivers to get their basic needs met (initially) and then to develop a schema (or response set) for interacting with the world (and others) around them. The development of attachment styles has been described as a “womb” for the “psychological birth” of the infant and necessary for the health of a child (5). In fact, attachment is considered a system, referring to the innate human ability to establish significant emotional and strong relationships with one's caregivers (6). The relationship is

established between the child and the mother or primary caregiver who regularly and truly interacts with him/her (7), with the aim to achieve a sense of security and support with an attachment figure (8). Ainsworth and her associates experimentally defined three subgroupings of attachment relationships: secure, anxious-avoidant, and anxious-resistant (or ambivalent) attachment styles (4).

The most essential part of attachment theory lies in the hypothesis that the experiences of early relationships create active internal patterns in childhood, which affect future knowledge and relationships (9). In other words, this pattern is internalized and later generalized to establishing relationships with others (10). Individual differences are internalized as active patterns that are associated with adult attachment orientations with distinct patterns of coping styles and emotional regulation strategies (11). Accordingly, the attachment system activity is not limited to childhood. Children's early relationships are considered prototypes for their next relationship, even strangers (12). To date, much of the empirical research suggests that attachment is considerably important in adults' relationship with others, particularly their romantic and marital relationships (7, 13). Most research conducted in our country and abroad shows that there is a significant and positive correlation between secure attachment and marital satisfaction and a significant and negative relationship between insecure attachment styles and marital satisfaction (3, 4, 8-10, 14).

On the other hand, recent research suggests that lifestyle is an important factor influencing the level of marital satisfaction. As a result, maritally satisfied couples adopt a lifestyle based on cooperation and shared goals. Then, they experience marital satisfaction (15). Lifestyle is a relatively fixed style by which couples achieve their goals. This is the result of an individual's childhood. This remains relatively constant during adult life (16).

The methods by which couples express their closeness to each other are greatly influenced by the needs and expectations the couples have developed from their families (2). Personality style is one of the most important factors affecting intimacy between couples. The differences in how families express emotions also lead to varying expectations regarding intimacy and love within these families (2). Penman referred to Waite and Gallagher findings, which showed that married couples have a healthier lifestyle, longer lifetime, and more sexual satisfaction (17, 18).

In a study conducted on styles of attachment and social skills in university students the results indicated that attachment styles predict social skills (19). Adlerian theorists believe that lifestyle originates in the behavioral combinations that a child attempts to find a place in the family to get his or her needs met. In the next phase of development, attachment behaviors become more organized into a working model of self and others, just as the private logic of the child the methods for solving problems and confronting the tasks of life is organized into a schema of apperception and eventually the lifestyle. From this working model, the individual defines the quality and nature

of his or her affective, behavioral, cognitive, and physical development. Finally, as an individual matures, an internal working model of the world is developed from his/her attachment style, just as his/her lifestyle is established and employed with friends, school, work, family, and other social settings (4). Therefore, this study attempted to assess the effect of early child-parent relationships in childhood on marriage based on attachment styles and lifestyles.

## 2. Objectives

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between styles of attachment and lifestyles with marital satisfaction, and this study is a descriptive-correlational study.

## 3. Materials and Methods

The statistical population included all employees at Bandar Abbas oil refining and distribution company (Iran) in 2014, which consisted of 3500 employees. The sample size was determined using the following formula (is the multiple correlation coefficient). The level of was equal to 0.05,  $\beta$  was equal to 0.1, and the sample size was calculated as 290. In this study, the single-stage cluster random sampling method was used. For this purpose, all employees were divided into 5 clusters (groups) based on their location of residency (the employees lived in five districts proportional to their working experience). Then, 86 subjects (43 couples) were selected in each cluster using the simple random sampling method. The inclusion criteria were living with one's spouse for at least one year and living together. Prior to the implementation of the questionnaire, brief and necessary information was given to the subjects. The subjects had been assured that their information would be safe with the researcher. After collecting the questionnaires, according to inclusion and exclusion criteria, 28 couples questionnaires were excluded and incomplete (11 couples) and blank (30 couples) questionnaires were excluded from the study; a total of 292 questionnaires (146 couples) were analyzed due to the lack of cooperation of many subjects, and the lack cooperation of the husbands in particular. The research tools included the revised adult attachment scale (RAAS), life style questionnaire (LSQ), and the marital satisfaction scale.

The RAAS was first developed by Collins and Reid in 1990 and revised in 1996. This scale was based on attachment theory. It consists of 18 items. It was scored using a 5-point Likert scale. This questionnaire has three subscales: dependence, closeness, and anxiety. Finally, the subjects were divided into three groups based on the results: secure anxious and avoidant attachment styles. Questions 1, 6, 8, 12, 13, and 17 measure secure attachment, while questions 2, 5, 7, 14, 16, and 18 measure avoidant attachment and questions 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, and 15 measure anxious-ambivalent attachment. Questions with an asterisk should be scored reversely. The scores of the 6 items of each scale were added together and the subscale scores were obtained. The reliability of the questionnaire was 0.95; in this study, the reliability was 0.68 using Cronbach's alpha.

Life style questionnaire (LSQ): This questionnaire assesses lifestyle and consists of 10 factors, 70 questions on a Likert scale scored as never (0), sometimes (1), often (2), and always (3). Based on the factor analysis results, these 10 factors were extracted with eigenvalues greater than one. These factors explain 46.22% of the variance in lifestyle. Re-test and internal consistency were used to evaluate the reliability of the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the internal consistency between lifestyle factors and the total scale were calculated within a range from 0.76 to 0.89/0. The reliability coefficients were obtained within a range from 0.84 to 0.94 using the test-retest method (15). In this study, the reliability of the LSQ was 0.72 using Cronbach's alpha.

The ENRICH marital satisfaction scale measures marital relations, using 12 aspects of satisfaction. The original version of the test has 115 questions. Shorter forms were extracted to limit the length of the questionnaire. In this study, 47 items from the questionnaire was used. The questions were scored ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). Several questions were reverse-scored. A high score indicates greater marital satisfaction. Sanaei (20) calculated the reliability of the questionnaire using the test-retest method for men as 0.94, for women as 0.94, and for the entire sample as 0.94. The reliability coefficients of the subscales were obtained within a range from 0.50 to 0.87. Alpha coefficients of the 48-item short form questionnaire were respectively obtained as 0.92 and 0.95 by Mirkheshti and Soleimanian. The reliability of the marital satisfaction scale was 0.88 using Cronbach's alpha in this study.

In this study, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency, percentage) and inferential statistics (Pearson's correlation coefficient and multiple regressions) were used to analyze the data. In this study, the K-S Test was used to assess the normality. SPSS 2.0 was also used to analyze the data. The significance level was set as 0.05.

#### 4. Results

Table 1 summarizes the demographic data on the subjects.

**Table 1.** Demographic Data on the Subjects

	Values <sup>a</sup>
<b>Sex</b>	
Male	146 (50)
Female	146 (50)
<b>Age</b>	
< 30	
Male	6 (16)
Female	41 (16)
30 - 40	
Male	86 (59)
Female	87 (59)
> 40	
Male	42 (18)
Female	10 (18)

<b>Duration of marriage</b>	
< 5	54 (18)
5 - 10	121 (41)
10 - 15	60 (21)
15 - 20	36 (12)
> 20	16 (5.5)
<b>Physical health</b>	
Frequency	292 (100)
Average	15.60 ± 3.3
<b>Exercise and fitness</b>	
Frequency	292 (100)
Average	11.54 ± 4.1
<b>Weight control and nutrition</b>	
Frequency	292 (100)
Average	13.33 ± 3.35
<b>Illness prevention</b>	
Frequency	292 (100)
Average	16.06 ± 3.22
<b>Psychological health</b>	
Frequency	292 (100)
Average	14.91 ± 3.23
<b>Spiritual health</b>	
Frequency	292 (100)
Average	13.77 ± 3.16
<b>Social health</b>	
Frequency	292 (100)
Average	15.46 ± 3.66
<b>Drug and alcohol avoidance</b>	
Frequency	292 (100)
Average	14.98 ± 3.69
<b>Accident prevention</b>	
Frequency	292 (100)
Average	15.61 ± 3.47
<b>Environmental health</b>	
Frequency	292 (100)
Average	13.73 ± 3.06
<b>Lifestyle</b>	
Frequency	292 (100)
Average	148.10 ± 2441
<b>Anxiety</b>	
Frequency	292 (100)
Average	2.48 ± 0.66
<b>Closeness</b>	
Frequency	292 (100)
Average	2.76 ± 0.55
<b>Dependence</b>	
Frequency	292 (100)
Average	2.76 ± 0.54
<b>Marital satisfaction</b>	
Frequency	292 (100)
Average	148.15 ± 13.45

<sup>a</sup>Values are expressed as No. (%) or mean ± SD.

As observed in the table, most of the participants in this study ranged from 30 to 40 years old and were married from 5 to 10 years. The correlation coefficients between the variables are shown in Table 2. According to this table, it can be observed that marital satisfaction is inversely related to anxiety and negatively related to attachment and closeness. In addition, multiple regression analysis was used to control confounders. Based on regression analysis, it was determined that only anxiety and attachment

had a significant relationship with marital satisfaction in the presence of other variables. The effect of anxiety was greater than that of closeness. The general model explained 23.5% of the variance in the criterion variable.

According to Table 3, an anxious attachment style negatively and significantly predicted marital satisfaction, while a dependent attachment style positively and significantly predicted marital satisfaction. Other components are not significant.

**Table 2.** Correlation Matrix of the Research Variables

	Marital Satisfaction	Anxiety	Closeness	Dependence	Lifestyle
<b>Marital satisfaction</b>					
<b>Anxiety</b>	-0.44 <sup>a</sup>				
<b>Closeness</b>	0.18 <sup>a</sup>	-0.22 <sup>a</sup>			
<b>Dependence</b>	0.14 <sup>a</sup>	-0.03	0.26 <sup>a</sup>		
<b>Life style</b>	0.21 <sup>a</sup>	-0.31 <sup>a</sup>	0.18 <sup>a</sup>	0.09	

<sup>a</sup>A significant correlation at the 0.01 level.

**Table 3.** B Coefficients, t-Values, and Significance Levels for Predictors in a Marital Satisfaction Model (Multiple Regression With a Simultaneous Entry Method)

Resources	Coefficients	Correction Coefficients	The Test Statistic	P Value
<b>Fixed</b>	150.667		18.165	0.000
<b>Physical health</b>	0.708	0.160	1.337	0.182
<b>Exercise and fitness</b>	0.398	0.119	0.742	0.458
<b>WeightControl and nutrition</b>	0.818	0.204	1.434	0.153
<b>Illness prevention</b>	0.822	0.197	1.507	0.133
<b>Psychological health</b>	0.218	0.052	0.399	0.691
<b>Spiritual health</b>	0.566	0.133	0.977	0.330
<b>Social health</b>	0.830	0.226	1.594	0.123
<b>Drug and alcohol avoidance</b>	-0.10	-0.003	-0.020	0.984
<b>Accident prevention</b>	0.412	0.107	0.742	0.459
<b>Environmental health</b>	0.771	0.157	1.369	0.172
<b>Lifestyle</b>	-0.507	-0.921	-1.222	0.223
<b>Anxiety</b>	-0.324	-0.409	-6.988	0.001
<b>Closeness</b>	1.488	-0.61	1.050	0.294
<b>Dependence</b>	2.747	0.110	1.969	0.05

## 5. Discussion

In this study, a significant and negative relationship was predicted between insecure attachment styles (avoidant and ambivalent) and marital satisfaction among subjects. In explaining these findings, it could be stated that individuals with insecure attachment styles (avoidant and ambivalent) are usually afraid of rejection and loneliness in their relationships (7, 13, 21, 22). A lack of self-confidence in dealing with stressful situations creates psychological stress for insecure individuals; as a result, they may feel humiliated and anxious (23). They feel they are inferior compared to others. They also have low expect-

tations regarding their future. These issues increase the likelihood of marital dissatisfaction in insecure people (7, 22).

They have negative attitudes toward their romantic experiences based on internal models. As a result, they get involved with counterproductive communicational methods. Attachment systems are activated during stressful life events. Thus, certain behaviors may be expressed in conflicting situations for each one of the attachment styles. Extreme attachment or detachment (physical and mental) and emotional reactions in crisis and in cases of

failure are considered characteristics of insecure individuals. These individuals may feel anxious or distressed when experiencing intimacy. They may be unresponsive or slightly sensitive in satisfying others' needs. Since insecure individuals prefer romantic relationships without love, and they may experience conflicted sexual relationships (7, 13, 24). Couples with an insecure attachment style may act conflicted and hostile and have marital dissatisfaction in their systematic relationships (13, 25).

In this study, no significant relationship was identified between a secure attachment style and marital satisfaction. However, further research showed that there is a positive relationship between attachment styles and marital satisfaction. Nevertheless, not all the findings confirmed this. For example, Hamidi (26) found out that the scores of men and women in marital satisfaction were not associated with attachment, contrary to expectations. The latter study was based on 27 couples in the late third or early fourth decade of married life. In addition, all the couples had children. The results showed that women's scores on the Marital Adjustment Scale were not associated with their attachment styles, contrary to expectations, suggesting that the following hypothesis that the association between attachment styles and marital satisfaction may be to some extent dependent on different communicational approaches in various attachment style groups. In other words, the communicational patterns may act as a mediator variable. However, these findings did not support this hypothesis in practice. The authors highlighted the fact that at least the attachment relationship has an independent impact on marital satisfaction in early marriage.

On the other hand, a number of researchers have emphasized that recalling past events is not solely dependent on an individual, but also depends on the quality of interactions with others. Kubak believed that recalling childhood experiences by adults is largely dependent on how safe they feel, as if they feel safe currently, they may have a highly positive attitude toward past events. According to Kvbak, followers of subjective relations do not pay sufficient attention to the correlation between an individual's emotional state now and the effect of recalling past experiences (ibid). On the other hand, there are some special circumstances in the present case, such as employees' long work hours, living in a closed environment, certain climatic conditions of the city, and being away from their extended families, that may cause them to have insecure rather than secure attachment styles (27).

On the other hand, a couple's harmonic attachment style considerably affects their marital satisfaction. In fact, if couples are more in love with each other, they may have greater marital satisfaction (28). Eidi and Khanjani showed that the highest level of marital satisfaction is observed among couples with a secure attachment style, while the lowest level is observed among the couples with an avoidant attachment style. A couple with opposite attachment styles (secure and insecure) are less likely to have their basic needs met, such as comfort, care, and successful sex-

ual relationships. They are less preoccupied and obsessed with each other, they are more hostile, they talk less to each other, and they are less committed to each other (29).

Banse believed that not only can a combination of attachment styles be effective, but also cultural norms between men and women in romantic relationships in their demands to develop the theoretical perspectives and better understand the function of secure and insecure attachment styles (30).

In the sample included in the present study, the subjects were selected from different towns and cities across the country with diverse cultures. Culture includes family traditions, religion, and ethnicity, which are largely affected by the culture of the original family (2). Many studies have been conducted on marital satisfaction in which little attention was paid to the role of culture, ethnicity, and race on marital experiences. Despite speculation, cultural background is related to marital satisfaction (23).

It should be noted that this issue cannot be regarded independently, but many other factors can contribute to this relationship, such as the number of children, the role of parents, and the relatives' impact on marital satisfaction (31). Noder conducted a study on the impact of attachment on marital satisfaction and the parental role in married couples. They stated that marital satisfaction may decline as a result of having children. Several researchers have attempted to explain this phenomenon through attachment theory (32). Thus, although it is interesting to investigate the relationship of attachment style in childhood with adult behavior in adulthood, there are other important factors in this regard.

### 5.1. Conclusions

The results showed that the early relationship within the family environment supports a certain attachment style (avoidant insecure and ambivalent insecure), and this affects couples' interpersonal relations in adulthood. On the other hand, the results showed that the effect of attachment styles on interpersonal relations is far greater than that of lifestyle.

However, in this article, the major theoretical tenets of attachment theory and individual psychology were expressed. The major area of convergence between the two theories is that both include a coherent and stable view of the self and the world and acknowledge the importance of social interaction for the expression of these patterns. Adlerian theorists believe that lifestyle originates in the behavioral combinations that a child attempts to find a place in the family to get his or her needs met. In the next phase of development, attachment behaviors become more organized into a working model of the self and others, just as the private logic of the child is organized into a schema of apperception and eventually his/her lifestyle. From this working model, the individual defines the quality and nature of his or her affective, behavioral, cognitive, and physical development. Finally,

as the individual matures, an internal working model of the world is developed from his/her attachment style, just as his/her lifestyle is established and employed with friends, school, work, family, and other social settings (4).

The conflict of interest in this study refers to the importance of early relationships in childhood that will have a lasting impact on relationships, friendships, the selection of a mate, and marital satisfaction.

In the regression model, the main objective of increasing the number of independent variables undoubtedly increased the forecast accuracy, but the additional contribution of the lifestyle variable was not statistically significant in the regression. The limitations of the study were that fewer men participated than women and there was a lengthy questionnaire.

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