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Relationship between Family Environment and Attachment Insecurity among Individuals in Romantic Relationships

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Abstract: Family environment represents an important context for the development of interpersonal expectations and patterns of relating to others. The present study examined the relationship between family environment and attachment-related anxiety and attachment-related avoidance among individuals involved in romantic relationships. A quantitative, cross-sectional correlational research design was employed with 150 individuals aged 18–40 years who were currently involved in romantic relationships. Family environment was assessed using the Family Environment Scale (FES), which comprises 10 subscales organized into Relationship, Personal Growth, and System Maintenance dimensions. Attachment was assessed using the Experiences in Close Relationships–Revised (ECR-R), measuring attachment-related anxiety and attachment-related avoidance. Pearson's product–moment correlations were conducted to examine the associations between family environment and attachment dimensions. At the broad dimensional level, System Maintenance was significantly and negatively associated with attachment-related avoidance, whereas the other broad family environment dimensions were not significantly associated with attachment. At the subscale level, Cohesion, Expressiveness, and Independence were negatively associated with both attachment-related anxiety and avoidance, whereas Conflict was positively associated with both dimensions. Moral-Religious Emphasis showed weak positive associations with both attachment dimensions, while Control was negatively associated with attachment-related avoidance. Overall, the findings suggest that specific characteristics of family environment, particularly cohesion, emotional expressiveness, conflict, and independence, may be associated with attachment-related experiences in close relationships.

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The findings highlight the importance of examining specific family interaction patterns rather than considering family environment only as a global construct.

Keywords: *Family Environment, Attachment-Related Anxiety, Attachment-Related Avoidance, Romantic Relationships, Family Functioning, Attachment Insecurity*

1. Introduction

The family represents one of the earliest and most influential social environments in which an individual's emotional, psychological, and interpersonal foundations are established. Beyond providing physical care and security, the family provides a context in which individuals learn how to communicate, express emotions, manage conflict, develop interpersonal expectations, and form relationships with others. The quality of the family environment, reflected in aspects such as warmth, cohesion, conflict, communication, and organization, plays an important role in shaping an individual's psychological and interpersonal development over time (Moos & Moos, 1976; Shaffer, 2009). From an interpersonal perspective, early family experiences are particularly important because repeated interactions with caregivers contribute to the development of expectations about the self and others. Seigel's (2012) framework of Interpersonal Neurobiology (IPNB) provides an integrative perspective by bringing together findings from neuroscience, psychology, attachment theory, and the social sciences to understand how interpersonal experiences influence development and emotional well-being. Within this perspective, relationships are not viewed merely as social experiences but as important contexts for the development of emotional regulation, interpersonal functioning, and patterns of relating to others.

Attachment theory further explains this process by suggesting that early experiences with caregivers shape internal working models that influence how individuals perceive themselves, others, and their relationships. Bowlby's attachment theory proposed that interactions between children and their caregivers contribute to the development of relatively stable expectations about the availability and responsiveness of significant others (Bowlby, 1969). When caregivers are consistently responsive and emotionally available, children may develop expectations that others can be trusted and that their own needs are worthy of attention. In contrast, inconsistent, rejecting, hostile, or emotionally unavailable caregiving may contribute to less secure expectations about oneself and others. These internal working models can subsequently influence interpersonal behavior and expectations beyond the parent-child relationship. Thus, although attachment develops within early caregiving relationships, its impact may extend into later social and intimate relationships. The relevance

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of early attachment experiences to adult romantic relationships was highlighted by Hazan and Shaver (1987), who conceptualized romantic love as an attachment process. Their work extended the principles of attachment theory from infant-caregiver relationships to adult romantic relationships and suggested that individuals' attachment-related expectations can be reflected in the way they experience intimacy, dependence, trust, and emotional closeness with romantic partners. Therefore, the family environment may represent an important developmental context through which individuals acquire relational expectations that can later become relevant to their romantic relationships.

Family environment refers to the emotional climate, interpersonal relationships, patterns of interaction, and behavioral expectations that characterize family life. Balda et al. (2019) described family environment in terms of the quality and quantity of socio-emotional support and understanding provided by parents within the home. Minuchin (1974) emphasized the structural organization of the family, including roles, boundaries, and patterns of interaction within the family system. Moos and Moos (1986) provided a multidimensional framework for understanding family environment. Their Family Environment Scale identifies ten dimensions: Cohesion, Expressiveness, Conflict, Independence, Achievement Orientation, Intellectual-Cultural Orientation, Active-Recreational Orientation, Moral-Religious Emphasis, Organization, and Control. Examining these dimensions provides a more comprehensive understanding of family environment than considering family functioning as a single global construct.

The significance of family experiences becomes particularly relevant when considering the development of adult attachment. Research has associated adverse or hostile family environments with difficulties in later romantic relationships. Individuals exposed to problematic family dynamics may experience greater difficulties with conflict resolution and interpersonal adjustment in adulthood (Pizzirani et al., 2021; Simpson et al., 2011). Similarly, characteristics of the family environment have been associated with relationship satisfaction and stability in later romantic relationships (Friesen et al., 2010; Parade et al., 2012; Vaillancourt-Morel et al., 2019). Longitudinal evidence has further suggested that quality of family interactions during adolescence is associated with later romantic relationship behavior and attachment security in adulthood (Larsen-Rife et al., 2009). These findings suggest that experiences within the family of origin may continue to influence interpersonal relationships formed later in life.

Adult attachment can be understood in terms of how individuals perceive themselves in relation to others and how comfortable they are with intimacy, dependence, trust, and

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emotional closeness. Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) proposed a four-category model of adult attachment based on two fundamental dimensions: individuals' perceptions of themselves and their perceptions of others. Based on these dimensions, they identified four attachment patterns: secure, preoccupied, fearful-avoidant, and dismissive avoidant. Secure attachment is characterized by a positive view of oneself and others, along with comfort with intimacy and trust in close relationships. Preoccupied attachment involves a negative view of the self but a positive view of others, often accompanied by a strong need for acceptance and reassurance. Fearful-avoidant attachment reflects negative views of both the self and others, with a desire for closeness accompanied by concerns about rejection or hurt. In contrast, dismissive-avoidant attachment involves a positive view of the self but a negative view of others, often reflected in a preference for independence and emotional distance (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

Within this framework, attachment insecurity refers to difficulties in developing and maintaining a sense of security in close relationships. It may involve concerns about rejection or abandonment, a need for reassurance, discomfort with intimacy, or emotional distancing. These patterns are particularly relevant to romantic relationships, where intimacy, trust, emotional dependence, and vulnerability are central to interpersonal functioning. The relationship between family environment and adult attachment can be understood from a developmental perspective. Repeated family interactions may shape individuals' expectations about whether others are trustworthy, whether emotional needs can be expressed safely, and whether closeness is associated with acceptance or rejection. These experiences may contribute to internal models of self and others that influence later romantic relationships. Consistent with this perspective, warmth, caring, and sensitivity within family interactions have been associated with greater attachment security and more adaptive interpersonal functioning in romantic relationships (Larsen-Rife et al., 2009). Although attachment continues to develop across adulthood, the family environment remains an important context for understanding individual differences in attachment insecurity.

Therefoe, the present study aims to examine the relationship between family environment and attachment insecurity among individuals in romantic relationships.

2. Methods

2.1 *Aim*

To examine the relationship between family environment and attachment insecurity among individual involved in romantic relationship.

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2.2 *Objectives*

1. To assess the dimensions of family environment among individuals involved in romantic relationships.
2. To assess attachment-related anxiety and attachment-related avoidance among individuals involved in romantic relationships.
3. To examine the relationship between family environment and attachment-related anxiety among individuals involved in romantic relationships.
4. To examine the relationship between family environment and attachment-related avoidance among individuals involved in romantic relationships.

2.3 *Hypotheses*

H1. There will be a significant relationship between family environment dimensions and attachment-related anxiety among individuals involved in romantic relationships.

H2. There will be a significant relationship between family environment dimensions and attachment-related avoidance among individuals involved in romantic relationships.

2.4 *Research Design*

The present study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational research design to examine the relationship between family environment and attachment insecurity among individuals involved in romantic relationships.

2.5 *Participants*

The study included 150 individuals aged 18 to 40 years who were currently involved in a romantic relationship. Participants were selected using convenience sampling.

2.6 *Measures*

Table 1: *Description of Measures Used in the Study*

Measure	Description	Dimensions/Subscales	Items & Response Format
Family Environment Scale (FES)	The FES assesses the social environment of the family through 10 subscales organized into three major dimensions.	Relationship Dimensions: Cohesion, Expressiveness, Conflict. Personal Growth Dimensions: Independence, Achievement	90 items; 9 items per subscale. Items are answered in a True/False format.

		Orientation, Intellectual-Cultural Orientation, Active-Recreational Orientation, Moral-Religious Emphasis. System Maintenance Dimensions: Organization, Control.	
Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R)	The ECR-R is a 36-item self-report measure of adult attachment assessing attachment-related anxiety and attachment-related avoidance.	Attachment-related Anxiety: Items 1-18. Attachment-related Avoidance: Items 19-36.	36 items rated on a 7-point scale, from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree

3. Results

The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: *Participants' Characteristics (N = 150)*

Characteristics	Category	n	%
Age (years)	18-25	48	32.0
	26-30	29	19.3
	31-35	51	34.0
	36-40	22	14.7
Gender	Male	78	52.0
	Female	72	48.0
Education Qualification	Higher secondary	42	28.0
	Graduate	46	30.7
	Postgraduate	62	41.3
Residential Status	Rural	67	44.7

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	Urban	83	55.3
Occupation	Student	30	20.0
	Unemployed	21	14.0
	Homemaker	33	22.0
	Private employee	30	20.0
	Government employee	36	24.0
Duration of relationship (years)	1-3	46	30.7
	4-6	45	30.0
	7-8	59	39.3

Pearson's product-moment correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between family environment and attachment dimensions among individuals involved in romantic relationships. As shown in Table 3, the Relationship dimension of family environment was negatively associated with attachment-related anxiety ($r = -.110$, $p = .179$) and attachment-related avoidance ($r = -.150$, $p = .067$). However, both associations were statistically non-significant. The Personal Growth dimension was also not significantly associated with attachment-related anxiety ($r = -.063$, $p = .444$) or attachment-related avoidance ($r = .005$, $p = .949$). Similarly, System Maintenance showed a non-significant negative association with attachment-related anxiety ($r = -.075$, $p = .361$). However, System Maintenance was significantly and negatively associated with attachment-related avoidance ($r = -.206$, $p = .012$), indicating that higher levels of system-maintenance characteristics were associated with lower attachment-related avoidance. In addition, attachment-related anxiety was positively correlated with attachment-related avoidance ($r = .360$, $p < .001$). Overall, among the three family environment dimensions, only System Maintenance showed a statistically significant association with an attachment dimension, specifically attachment-related avoidance (see Table-3).

Table 3: *Correlation Matrix of Family Environment Dimensions and ECR-Attachment Dimensions*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Relationship					
2. Personal Growth	.125				

3. System Maintenance	.050	.009			
4. Attachment-related anxiety	-.110	-.063	-.0.75		
5. Attachment-related avoidance	-.150	.005	-.206*	.360***	

To provide a more detailed understanding of these relationships, correlations were further examined across the ten Family Environment Scale subscales. Attachment-related anxiety was significantly and negatively associated with Cohesion (r = -.246, p = .002), Expressiveness (r = -.287, p < .001), and Independence (r = -.264, p = .001), whereas Conflict was positively associated with attachment-related anxiety (r = .334, p < .001). moral-Religious Emphasis also showed a weak positive association with attachment-related anxiety (r = .199, p = .014). No significant associations were observed for Achievement Orientation, Intellectual-Cultural Orientation, Active-Recreational Orientation, Organization and Control. With respect to attachment-related avoidance, Cohesion (r = -.312, p < .001), Expressiveness (r = -.305, p < .001), and Independence (r = -.247, p = .002) showed significant negative associations, whereas Conflict was positively associated with attachment-related avoidance (r = .352, p < .001). Moral-Religious Emphasis (r = -.181, p = .027) also showed significant associations. The remaining subscales were not significantly associated with attachment-related avoidance (see Table-4).

Table 4: *Correlation Matrix of Family Environment Dimensions and ECR-Attachment Dimensions*

Family Environment Subscale	Attachment-related anxiety	Attachment-related avoidance
Cohesion	-.246**	-.312***
Expressiveness	-.287***	-.305***
Conflict	.334***	.352***
Independence	-.264**	-.247**
Achievement Orientation	.055	.002
Intellectual-Cultural Orientation	-.052	.107

Active-Recreational Orientation	-.043	-.002
Moral-Religious Emphasis	.199*	.173*
Organization	-.024	-.094
Control	-.077	-.181*

4. Discussion

The family environment provides an important context for the development of emotional expression, communication, conflict management, autonomy, and expectations about relationships. These experiences may be particularly relevant to adult attachment because repeated interactions within the family can contribute to individuals' expectations regarding the availability, responsiveness, trustworthiness, and emotional accessibility of others. Previous studies also suggested that family-of-origin experiences are associated with later romantic relationship functioning and attachment security (Larsen-Rife et al., 2009; Pizzirani et al., 2021; Simpson et al., 2011). The present study examined the relationship between family environment and attachment-related anxiety and avoidance among individuals involved in romantic relationships. At the broad dimensional level, most associations were non-significant. However, System Maintenance was significantly and negatively associated with attachment-related avoidance (see Table-3). Further analysis at the subscale level revealed more specific associations, particularly for Cohesion, Expressiveness, Conflict, and Independence.

Cohesion was negatively associated with both attachment-related anxiety and avoidance, while Expressiveness also showed significant negative associations with both dimensions. This suggests that individuals who perceived greater emotional connection and openness within their families tended to report lower attachment insecurity (see Table-4). These findings are consistent with the developmental perspective that supportive and emotionally responsive family interactions may contribute to more secure expectations in later relationships. Larsen-Rife et al. (2009) reported that the quality of family interactions during adolescence was associated with later romantic relationship behavior and attachment security. Similarly, Dinero et al. (2008) found that positive family interaction characteristics, particularly warmth and sensitivity, were associated with greater attachment security in adulthood. The present findings extend this perspective by showing that both cohesion and emotional expressiveness were related to lower levels of anxiety and avoidance.

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In contrast, Conflict was positively associated with both attachment-related anxiety ($r = .334$, $p < .001$) and avoidance ($r = .352$, $p < .001$). Thus, individuals reporting greater family conflict also tended to report greater attachment insecurity. This finding is consistent with previous literature suggesting that problematic family dynamics may be associated with difficulties in later interpersonal and romantic relationships (Pizzirani et al., 2021; Simpson et al., 2011). Frequent interpersonal conflict may contribute to expectations that close relationships are associated with rejection, instability, or emotional difficulty, although the present cross-sectional findings cannot establish a cause-and-effect relationship. Independence was negatively associated with both attachment-related anxiety and avoidance. This may suggest that a family environment allowing individuals to develop autonomy while maintaining interpersonal connection is associated with lower attachment insecurity. Importantly, this finding indicates that independence should not necessarily be interpreted as emotional detachment; rather, healthy autonomy may coexist with comfortable interpersonal closeness.

Other Personal Growth characteristics, including Achievement Orientation, Intellectual-Cultural Orientation, and Active-Recreational Orientation, were not significantly associated with either attachment dimension. Similarly, Organization was not significantly associated with attachment. These findings suggest that specific relational characteristics of family functioning may be more closely related to attachment experiences than some achievement-oriented or organizational characteristics. At the broad level, System Maintenance was negatively associated with attachment-related avoidance. However, because Organization was not significantly related to avoidance and Control showed only a weak negative association, the findings suggest that this relationship may not be consistent across all components of System Maintenance.

Overall, the findings indicate that the relationship between family environment and attachment is not uniform across all aspects of family functioning. The most consistent pattern was observed for Cohesion, Expressiveness, Conflict, and Independence. This is broadly consistent with previous research suggesting that family relationships and communication patterns may be relevant to later romantic attachment and relationship functioning (Friesen et al., 2010; Parade et al., 2012; Vaillancourt-Morel et al., 2019). The findings have implications for family counselling and relationship-focused interventions. Assessment of family functioning may benefit from examining specific areas such as cohesion, emotional expression, conflict, and autonomy. Interventions may focus on

strengthening emotional communication, promoting constructive conflict management, and supporting a healthy balance between interpersonal closeness and personal autonomy.

5. Conclusion

The present study found that specific characteristics of family environment were associated with attachment-related anxiety and avoidance among individuals involved in romantic relationships. Greater Cohesion, Expressiveness, and Independence were associated with lower attachment insecurity, whereas greater Conflict was associated with higher anxiety and avoidance. System Maintenance was also negatively associated with attachment-related avoidance at the broad dimensional level. Overall, the findings suggest that the relational and emotional qualities of family life may be more closely related to attachment experiences than family functioning considered as a single global construct. These findings are consistent with previous research highlighting the relevance of family-of-origin experiences to later interpersonal and romantic relationships

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