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ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

Relationship between Attachment Dimensions and Emotion Regulation among Adolescents

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Abstract— Early experiences with attachment figures significantly influence the development of emotional regulation, which plays a crucial role during the transition from childhood to adolescence—a period marked by rapid psychological and physiological changes. This research aimed to explore the relationship between attachment dimensions and the regulation of three types of emotions—anger, sadness, and fear- among children and early adolescents aged 10-16. A cross-sectional study design was employed. The sample consisted of 312 students (140 males and 172 females) from government and private schools in Islamabad, with a mean age of 13.8 years (*SD*=1.57). The "Experiences in Close Relationships" (ECR) instrument, in age-appropriate versions, was used to assess the attachment dimensions of both children and their mothers. The children's emotion regulation strategies were assessed using the "Emotion Regulation Inventory" (ERI). Both instruments were translated into Urdu following World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines for translation of interventions. The most endorsed emotion among the sample was anger, while the least endorsed emotion was sadness. Alpha reliabilities for the instruments ranged from 0.65 to 0.85. Regression analysis revealed that attachment anxiety was positively associated with anger suppression and fear dysregulation. Attachment avoidance was associated with anger dysregulation and fear suppression. No significant association was found for the emotion of sadness. The results highlight the complex dynamics between attachment dimensions and emotion regulation. Children with attachment anxiety tend to suppress anger and dysregulate fear, whereas those with attachment avoidance tend to dysregulate anger and suppress fear. The study underscores the importance of considering attachment styles in understanding emotion regulation strategies in children and adolescents, as these dynamics have significant implications for daily life interactions and psychological development.

Index Terms— Attachment styles, Emotion regulation, Adolescence, Dysregulation, Suppression, Emotions

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Introduction

Early experiences hold a significant place in the life of an individual as they are the cornerstones of future personality development, including emotion regulation (Godor et al., 2023). The most critical source of experiences in infancy is the mother-child relationship. This relationship can become the whole ground for the development of the individual as it sets out pathways for the development of interpersonal, emotion regulation, personal expectations, and arousal modulation (Eilert & Buchheim, 2023). Neurobiological studies

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have deemed attachment-related communication to have a critical role in the processing of emotion, stress management, and regulation (Rogers et al., 2022). Studies also assert that attachment theory deals with effect rather than behavior and is basically a regulation theory (Fonagy & Target, 2002). According to Bowlby (1969/1982, 1973), early interactions with attachment figures are crucial for the later development of adjustment, emotion regulation, and development of psychopathology along with future relationships (Waters et al., 2002).

Attachment styles have been explained through different models. One of the models proposed by Brenan, Clark, and Shaver (1998). In this model, attachment is viewed along two dimensions, i.e. attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. According to their model, the essential features of Ainsworth's attachment patterns can be described along two discriminant functions, i.e., avoidance (desire to maintain distance and independence) and anxiety (lack of interest in exploring new situations, crying, angry protest directed at mother in her absence and presence). Both dimensions of anxiety and avoidance are associated with difficulty in maintaining a healthy relationship with the attachment figure and maintaining the consequent distress through secondary attachment strategies (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2023). These strategies develop because of the inability to receive the appropriate attachment-related response from the attachment figure. On the fulfillment of attachment-related needs, others are perceived as available and responsive, and the self is seen as worthy and competent (Azani Sadka et al., 2024). However, when the need is not fulfilled, negative representations of self and others are formed, and other strategies for the fulfillment of attachment needs are developed (Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1988). This attachment pattern develops throughout the early years till adulthood; while early years are critical for development, significant changes occur in childhood and adolescence as well. As a child enters school, he is under pressure to achieve academic and social skills. Peers are more valued by the child, and children have a preference with peers as compared to parents and siblings (Gonzalez-Moreira et al., 2024). According to Bowlby, the goal of the attachment system here is the availability of attachment figures rather than proximity; thus, children endure longer separations and increased distance as long the individual is aware that he can make contact with the attachment figure if needed. Children at the age of 11- 12 show a preference towards parents over peers in situations where they are sad or in difficulty (Wright et al., 2023). At the end of middle childhood, the child and parent have a collaborative alliance in which he depends on the parents as an added resource rather than completely depending on the parent (Brumariu, 2015).

Adolescents are found to have a preference for proximity towards their peers rather than parents. However, when they are in a state of distress, they prefer to have their parents around (Seibert & Kerns, 2009). Moreover, in this stage, adolescents also struggle for behavioral autonomy, and they fight their attachment process (Panahi et al., 2023). The adolescent's previous behaviors and actions that resulted in the proximity and support of the attachment figure are now a threat to his autonomy, so it might be possible that the individual becomes dismissive of attachment (Allen et al., 2018; Stern et al., 2021). As adolescents reach adulthood, they are driven by extreme biological and social transitions. Parents continue to be important attachment figures even in adulthood, and the attachment system is likely to activate and be readily observable under conditions of danger and separation distress (Cassidy et al., 2013).

The most challenging stage for an individual is adolescence, where he/she is bombarded with novel situations both psychologically and physiologically with the sudden change in emotional awareness and the subsequent emergence of a pattern of emotion regulation; thus, it is a time of increased vulnerability to poor regulation strategies and psychopathology and requires the development of emotion regulation in an adaptive manner (Silvers, 2022). Adolescence is a transition from dependence to autonomy. Individuals are growing free from parental support and can respond to situations in accordance with his/her nature (Casey, 2010). Therefore, adaptive emotion regulation strategies might be protective against the emotional challenges faced by the individual (McLaughlin et al., 2011). However, every emotion evokes a response from the individual, and many theorists have laid emphasis on attachment styles being one of the contributing factors (Eldesouky & Gross, 2019). Therefore, it is important to understand how individuals choose a coping strategy based on the specific emotional context.

Theoretical foundations and research background

According to Bowlby, a child learns to regulate emotions in the presence of attachment security. Whenever the child's distress is responded to in a sensitive manner, such as if the attachment figure responds attentively, the child learns that he can effectively regulate distressing emotions and experiences if the attachment figure is available. However, at times when the attachment figure is not available or is ignorant of the needs of the child, he will learn that negative experiences also occur in emotion regulation (Cooper, Shaver & Collins, 1998). These recurrent expectancies are regularized in the child's working models and consist of all the relevant information regarding a child's emotional experiences and attachment relationships, along with rules for regulating and expressing emotions. (Bowlby, 1969). Securely attached individuals can acknowledge their distress and are able to rely on the attachment figure; anxiously attached individuals can also turn to the attachment figure in times of distress but in a hyper-vigilant manner that can hinder the development of their own confidence and autonomy and avoidantly attached individuals purposively hide their own emotions and feelings (Cooper, Shaver & Collins, 1998).

Regardless of the attachment rules, the attachment system gets activated whenever the individual is placed in a threatening context and results in the activation of attachment-related behaviors. However, in anxious individuals, the pathway of attachment activation is

affected by an excitatory neural circuit that results from the hyperactivation. An inhibitory neural circuit is present in the avoidant individuals due to the deactivating strategies. After activation, the attachment figure is available for the individual, consequently resulting in having a secure base and allowing the individual to rely on the attachment figure for support and consider their availability as a reliable source of coping in times of need (Shaver & Hazan, 1993). On appraisal of the attachment figure as unavailable, insecurity in the attachment relationship develops and elevates the distress level already present due to a threatening situation. At this point, the individual needs to decide if he can depend upon the attachment figure for comfort and gain protection. If he considers it as a viable option based on past experiences and history, the individual adopts hyper-activating strategies (Cassidy & Koback, 1988). In the case of hyperactivation, the threshold of distress and threat-related cues is decreased, and the individual becomes extra conscious about the signs of any attachment-related threats, e.g., clinging to the attachment figure in case she leaves the room, reaching out to the attachment figure in the probability that she might reject or ignore any attempts of seeking proximity, perceived similarity and intimacy with attachment figure and considering self as helpless at regulating distress (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). If proximity seeking is not considered a dependable option, the individual adopts deactivating strategies involving repression and suppression of attachment-related needs, increased self-reliance, and decreased dependence on others. High attachment avoidance leads to lower levels of emotional engagement, low levels of intimacy, suppression of painful thoughts and repression of hurtful memories, projection of negative self-traits onto others, and failure to acknowledge negative emotions (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003).

Secure attachment in the early years provides a child with a strong base on which to develop successfully in the future challenges faced by a child, such as school, peers, identity, etc. This enhances their cognitive functioning and emotion regulation skills (Wesarg-Menzel et al., 2023). Emotion socialization also takes place in secure relationships in which parents endorse emotional coaching rather than emotional dismissal (Chen, Lin & Li, 2011). As adolescents reach adulthood, they are driven by extreme biological and social transitions. Parents continue to be important attachment figures even in adulthood, and the attachment system is likely to activate and be readily observable under conditions of danger and separation distress (Cassidy, Jones & Shaver, 2013).

Considering a functionalist perspective of emotion regulation, the strategies of emotion regulation are not completely adaptive or maladaptive. Rather, they are based on the goal of the individual (Park & Naragon-Gainey, 2024). For example, if a toddler shows a tantrum just to get the desired results from his parents, then he is not maladaptive at regulation, but he is intelligently using strategies to achieve his goal (Thompson, 2001). According to the functionalist view, emotions are defined primarily by the views of individual attainment and goals. The aspect of functionalism, which states that goal attainment is an important part of emotional regulation, is also explained by the utilitarian nature of emotion. When emotions are considered useful, individuals like to experience them even if they bear the unpleasant consequences. Studies show that emotion regulation comes under the category of self-regulation as an individual regulates it to fulfill his utilitarian purposes (Hopp, Troy & Mauss, 2011). Individuals have both explicit and implicit expressions of emotions. Whenever individuals have to approach a certain task, they experience emotions such as excitement, and whenever they have to avoid some work, they experience avoidance emotions such as worry. Moreover, in order to fulfill any goal, individuals experienced unpleasant emotions as well; if they were assigned a difficult task, they would anticipate threats and increase their level of worry in order to avoid the task. (Tamir, Chiu, & Gross, 2007).

Objective

- To understand the relationships between specific emotions and their regulation with respect to children's attachment dimensions.

Literature Review

Emotion regulation is highly dependent on the early attachment experiences of children as they provide the context for the development of regulation strategies. Secure attachment has been found to be related to a number of adaptive outcomes, such as greater awareness of emotional states and the use of constructive coping strategies (Kerns & Brumariu., 2013), open expression, and constructive emotion regulation (Girme et al., 2021) experiencing more positive and less negative affect, good peer relationships, social understanding (Tabachnick et al., 2022) and romantic relationships, Constructive coping strategies, higher frustration tolerance, cognitive problem-solving strategies, behavioral strategies better adjustment and academic achievement and positive attitude in social interactions (Suess & Sroufe, 2005; Obeldobel et al., 2022). Various explanations exist to explain the underlying processing in secure relationships (Brenning, Soenens, Van Petegem & Vansteenkiste, 2015). Fearful and avoidant attachment styles have been associated with internalizing symptoms of depression and anxiety. As both of these styles are involved with increased conscious attention to self and consistently being alarmed of any danger and abandonment, thus, they are also commonly associated with GAD. These attachment styles are characterized by hyper-activating strategies, which are an attempt to gain attention and elicit concern from others, seeking reassurance (Cougle et al., 2012). This is in line with Mikulincer & Shaver's (2003) model of affective concept in attachment. Individuals with attachment anxiety are often found to cope by using maladaptive strategies such as intense heightening of emotions or suppressing emotions. They usually tend to be impulsive

and misread other people's intentions, which often leads to a perception that they don't have any reliable and trustworthy source to rely on in distress. One explanation for the use of passive coping strategies is that these individuals have a pre-disposition towards rumination, which hinders them from using problem-solving strategies and coping with maladaptive tendencies (Bosquet & Egeland, 2006). Avoidantly attached individuals appear to use tactics such as denial and suppression, which have a strong negative impact on managing emotions (Karreman & Vingerhoets, 2012). An important aspect of the regulation of emotion is the identification and awareness of the felt emotion. Literature shows that avoidantly attached individuals have a lower level of emotional awareness as they always distance themselves from what they feel, and moreover, they also tend to hide and conceal their feelings. These underlying processes are also linked with the development of depressive symptoms whenever avoidantly attached individuals are under stress (Muris, Meesters, Van Melick, & Zwambag, 2001; Jeong et al., 2024). An inter-individual variation on positive and negative events shows that there are differences in the way securely and insecurely attached individuals perceive and manage themselves. Highly anxious individuals ruminate more about the management of negative affectivity and ruminate more about negative life events (Gentzler, Kerns & Keener, 2009). Experiencing distress or maintaining negative thoughts allows anxious individuals to express their distress, signal their need for attachment, and exhibit hyperactivation of their attachment system. Secure individuals manage their negative affectivity by engaging themselves in activities that enhance their positive feelings and experiences. They also try to look for the positive aspects of a bad situation and cope with negative affectivity (Pereg & Mikulincer, 2004). Insecurely attached individuals are not able to derive meaning from positive experiences as much as others and miss out on potential instances of feeling positive emotions. Avoidantly attached adults also showed suppression of feelings and support seeking for the management of distress. However, gender differences emerged, with women more prone to help-seeking (Mikulincer, 1995; George-Levi et al., 2022).

Rationale

Recently, there has been a shift towards the understanding of the attachment-based model of emotion regulation and the study of specific emotional context and their relationship. Literature has shown that owing to the goals of anxiously attached individuals to seek attention and support, they are likely to dysregulate sadness and fear, whereas avoidantly attached individuals are likely to suppress sadness and fear. Anger expressions are likely to be dysregulated by avoidantly and anxiously attached individuals (Brenning & Braet, 2013). Another study has also explored the role of attachment styles, context, and emotions and found that emotion dysregulation was associated with anxiously attached individuals, and suppression was associated with attachment avoidance (Clear & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2016; Eilert & Buchheim, 2023). Although the literature has established a link between emotion regulation and attachment, there is still a lack of research involving specific emotions (Brenning & Braet, 2013). Most of the research has measured emotion regulation on a general level, such as distress or as an experience of negative affect. As proposed by the functionalist theory of emotions, each emotion serves a distinct purpose, and the context accompanied by each emotional state is different from the other, so it might be possible that emotion regulation patterns are different due to this reason. Functionalist theories of emotion suggest that emotion regulation of specific emotions serves distinct social functions, a similar view is also shared in the differential emotions theory, which proposes that each distress emotion has a distinct social function and elicits specific reactions (Izard, 1991; Campos et al., 1994; Lench et al., 2014). Thus, studying the emotion regulation of a group of distressed emotions or negative emotions might not be able to explain the depth of understanding that is possible through studying each negative emotion separately. Moreover, differences exist in emotional responses and emotional appraisal on the basis of attachment style orientations. Thus, it might be possible that the experience of negative emotion has associations with distinct types of attachment styles as well (Eilert & Buchheim, 2023). Thus, the aim of this study is to explore the relationship between attachment styles and emotion regulation in adolescents based on the context of specific emotional states so that differences in regulation strategies can be mapped out.

Hypothesis

This path model diagram illustrates the hypothesized relationships between adolescent attachment dimensions (attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety) and emotion regulation strategies for anger, fear, and sadness. Hypothesis H1 posits that both attachment dimensions are associated with emotion regulation strategies for these emotions, while Hypothesis H2 suggests that attachment dimensions predict these emotion regulation strategies. The diagram uses distinct colors to differentiate between attachment dimensions and emotion regulation strategies, with labeled arrows indicating the hypothesized associations and predictions.

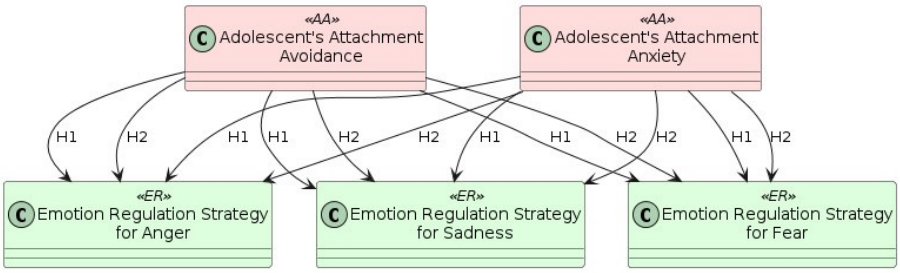

Fig. 1 *Conceptual model*

Methodology

Procedure

The present research was conducted on a cross-sectional sample using self-report measures. The sample was recruited conveniently from government schools in Islamabad. All the instruments were translated and adapted according to the World Health Organization's translation and adaptation procedure. (WHO, 2019). Permission to translate the tools was taken from the authors. The sample consisted of 312 participants (55% female) aged between 10-16 years (M= 12.8 years, SD= 0.49) from government schools in Islamabad living with biological mothers. Permission was obtained from the Federal Directorate of Education Islamabad (FDEI) to collect data from the schools of Islamabad. In each school, the school Principal, Vice Principal, and Head of the Department of Psychology were approached for permission to collect data. Data collection was conducted between January and May 2019 from all Model colleges under the jurisdiction of the Federal Directorate of Education Islamabad. A copy of the Questionnaire was given to the administration for review and record keeping. After seeking their approval, the consent form was given. Those students who had a signed consent form from their parents were included in the sample. The children were asked to fill out the Questionnaire in the classroom in the presence of the researcher. In all the administrations, children took almost 45 minutes. The Questionnaire was given to a maximum of twenty students at a time to manage it effectively.

Instruments

The Experiences in Close Relationships Scale-Revised (ECR-RC): The child version of ECR was developed by Brenning, Soenans, Braet & Bosmans in 2011. This scale was used to assess attachment dimensions, i.e., attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. The anxiety scale (18 items) assesses feelings of fear of abandonment and desires to be near the attachment figure. Items include 'I am afraid that my mother will leave me .'The avoidance scale (18 items) assesses discomfort with closeness, and issues with openness and self-disclosure items include 'I prefer not to show how I feel deep down.' Items are rated on a 7-point scale ranging from Not At All to Very Much. Studies in similar cultures show that both subscales have shown good reliability estimates, i.e., for anxious attachment was r = .91, and for avoidant attachment, r = .93 (Brenning & Braet, 2012). For measuring a mother's attachment style, The Experiences in Close Relationships Scale-Revised (adult version) (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan (2000) was used. The scale was translated and adapted into Urdu.

The Emotion Regulation Inventory: Emotion regulation strategies were assessed by ERI developed by Roth et al. (2009). Emotion regulation is measured on the subscales of dysregulation (6 items), suppression (7 items), and integration (7 items). Three separate scales were constructed to measure each emotion so that anger, fear, and sadness could be measured separately. The scale has shown good reliability estimates in previous studies measuring specific emotions. In previous studies, good reliability was observed for sadness suppression and dysregulation (.91, .87) and for anger suppression and dysregulation (.89, .88) (Clear & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2016)

Results

Table I
Demographic profile

variables	M	SD	Range	
			Minimum	Maximum
Age	12.89	.498	10	16
	Groups	Frequency	Percentage	
Gender	Male	140	44.7	
	Female	172	55.1	
Class	6th	85	27.2	
	7th	66	21.1	
	8th	70	22.4	
	9th	64	20.4	
	10th	24	7.7	
	11th	3	1.0	
birth order	Youngest	90	28.8	
	Middle	126	40.3	
	Oldest	96	30.7	
Mother's job status	Housewife	241	77	
	Working full time	49	15.7	
	Work from home	21	6.7	
Mother's qualification	Under matric	126	40.3	
	Matric	66	21.1	
	College	23	7.3	
	BA/ B.Sc	54	17.3	
	MA/ MSc	32	10.2	
	Postgraduate	9	2.9	
Type of family	Nuclear	205	65.5	
	Joint	105	33.5	
Siblings	0-2	183	58.5	
	3-4	121	38.7	
	5-9	9	2.9	
Brothers	0-1	245		
	3-4	59		
	4 and above	9		
Sisters	0	37	11.8	
	1-2	181	57.8	
	3 and above	68	21.7	
Mother's age	30-40	114	36.8	
	41-55	176	56.2	
	55-68	23	7.3	

(*N*= 312)

The table 1 shows that the sample comprised of a greater frequency of females 55.1 % than males 44.7%. most of the participants were in 6th class 27.2%, and the least children were from 1st year class almost 1%. The children that mostly constituted the sample were middle-born, which was almost 40.3%. children's mothers were mostly housewives, 77% of the data, and had the qualification under matric, almost 40.3 %. Most of the families belonged to a nuclear family system, which comprised almost 65% of the data.

Table II
Pearson Product correlation for Attachment styles and emotion regulation strategies of anger (*N*=252)

	M (*SD*)	1	2	3	4	5
1. Attachment Anxiety	50.33 (15.71)	-	.079	.115	-.163**	.015
2. Attachment Avoidance	62.45(19.62)		1	-.119	.092	.057
3. Anger Dysregulation	15.93(7.311)			1	-.572**	-.280**
4. Anger Suppression	19.90(7.63)				1	.172**
5. Anger Integration	21.56(7.18)					1

Correlation is significant at $p<0.01$ **

anxiety and anger suppression. The correlation suggests that as attachment anxiety increases, anger suppression decreases. Low scores on anger suppression denote that an individual tends to use this strategy frequently. This result supports the hypothesis, which states that there will be an association between attachment anxiety and anger suppression. No significant relationship has been found between attachment avoidance and emotion regulation of anger. Based on the direction of correlation, a negative relationship would have been found with anger dysregulation, which is in line with the hypothesis that as avoidance increases, anger dysregulation also increases. The values of remaining emotion regulation strategies are positive, showing that as avoidance increases, anger suppression, and anger integration also increase (denoting a decrease in the use of this strategy).

There is a significant negative relationship between anger dysregulation and anger suppression. This indicates that as dysregulation increases, anger suppression decreases or vice versa. Anger dysregulation has a negative relationship with anger integration and a positive relationship with anger suppression.

Table III
Pearson product correlation for attachment styles and emotion regulation strategies for fear (*N*=252)

	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5
1. Attachment Anxiety	50.33 (15.71)	1	.079	-.215*	-.149	-.047
2. Attachment Avoidance	62.45(19.62)		1	-.013	-.191*	-.131
3. Fear Dysregulation	18.52(6.65)			1	-.188*	-.215*
4. Fear Suppression	15.10(6.18)				1	.013
5. Fear Integration	17.46(6.01)					1

The table shows the correlation analysis between emotion regulation of fear and attachment styles. There is a significant negative relationship between attachment anxiety and fear dysregulation. It shows that as anxiety increases, the dysregulation of fear decreases. According to the instrument, low values of fear dysregulation mean that the person is frequently using this emotion regulation strategy. Here, a negative relationship indicates that as attachment avoidance increases (or decreases), suppression of fear also decreases (or increases). A lower value of fear suppression indicates that this emotion regulation strategy is frequently used while encountering fearful emotions. Table also shows that there is a negative relationship between fear dysregulation, fear suppression, and fear integration. This might indicate that these strategies are distinct when fearful emotions are being regulated.

Table IV
Pearson Product correlation for Attachment styles and emotion regulation strategies for sadness (*N*=77)

	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5
1. Attachment Anxiety	50.33 (15.71)	1	.079	-.047	-.192	.071
2. Attachment Avoidance	62.45(19.62)		1	-.006	.034	.031
3. Sadness Dysregulation	15.64(5.49)			1	-.146	.088
4. Sadness Suppression	16.91(6.01)				1	-.171
5. Sadness Integration	19.78(6.50)					1

Table shows that there are no significant relationships between attachment style dimensions and emotion regulation strategies. The direction of correlation coefficient shows that there is a negative relationship between attachment anxiety and dysregulation of sadness which indicates that as attachment anxiety increases, the emotion of sadness is dysregulated.

Table V
Multiple linear regression for attachment dimensions and anger suppression (*N*=252)

	Outcomes				
Predictors	B	β	*P*	95% CI	
				LB	UB
Attachment Anxiety	-.081	-.165**	.009	-.142	-.021
Attachment Avoidance	.038	.096	.123	-.010	.085
R^2	.036				

Note: B= unstandardized coefficient, β= standardized beta coefficient, CI= confidence interval **p<0.01

The table shows the results of multiple linear regression analysis. The analysis was conducted to examine the contribution of attachment style dimensions in predicting emotion regulation strategies. The analysis revealed that attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance explain only a 3% variance in the emotion regulation strategy of suppression. Attachment anxiety had a significant negative

impact on anger suppression. These findings show that attachment anxiety predicts the suppression of anger. Individuals with high attachment anxiety tend to suppress their anger.

Table VI
Multiple linear regression for attachment dimensions predicting fear dysregulation(*N*=116)

	Outcomes				
Predictors	*B*	*β*	sig	95% CI	
				LB	UB
Attachment Anxiety	-.0.73	-.215	.020	-.135	-.011
Attachment Avoidance	-0.02	.028	.936	-0.58	0.55
R^2	.046				

Note: B= unstandardized coefficient, *β*= standardized beta coefficient, CI= confidence interval *p<0.05

The table shows the results of the linear regression analysis. The analysis was conducted to examine the association of attachment dimensions with emotion dysregulation of fear. Results show that attachment styles contribute to a variance of 4% in emotion regulation. Attachment anxiety had a significant negative impact on the dysregulation of fear. This means that attachment anxiety would predict dysregulation of fear.

Table VII
Multiple linear regression for attachment dimensions predicting fear suppression (*N*=116)

			Outcome		
Predictors	B	*β*	Sig	95% CI	
				LB	UB
Attachment Anxiety	-.0.54	.153	.09	-0.24	.131
Attachment Avoidance	-.062	-.195	.03	-.152	-.005
R^2	.08				
F	3.78*				

Note: B= unstandardized coefficient, *β*= standardized beta coefficient, CI= confidence interval *p<0.05

The table shows the results of the linear regression analysis. The analysis was conducted to examine the association of attachment dimensions with emotion suppression of fear. Results show that attachment styles contribute to a variance of 6% in emotion regulation. Attachment avoidance had a significant negative impact on the dysregulation of fear. This pattern of coefficients indicates that, although anxiety is unrelated to the dependent variable, avoidance is negatively related to it. As such, the more avoidant people are with respect to attachment, the lower their scores on fear suppression. (meaning they suppress their fears).

Discussion

The present study aimed at looking into the relationship between attachment dimensions and emotion regulation among children and adolescents in the context of three different emotions. The study was conceptualized based on the findings of Mikulincer and Shaver's (2023) extensive research, which suggested that attachment dimensions have a role in predicting the kind of emotional regulation strategy employed by the individual. It was predicted that individuals high on attachment avoidance would employ distancing strategies and individuals high on attachment anxiety would employ hyper-activating strategies. It was also proposed that as each emotion serves a different function and presents a different context, the strategy would be affected by the context and the attachment dimension.

A positive relationship was found between attachment anxiety and anger suppression. Individuals high on attachment anxiety try to suppress their anger. This finding is in accordance with the literature, as anger is considered an emotion that is likely to be a response to a threatening situation and also creates discord in group cohesiveness. Most anxious individuals are in constant fear that other people, mostly their attachment figures, might leave them or reject them (Beryy., 2023; Camerman et al., 2023). Thus, they suppress their anger and cope in non-adaptive ways. They may avoid sharing their emotions due to a lack of trust and having a reliable relationship with attachment (Broodie et al., 2022). Anger suppression has been found to be associated with hypertension, gastrointestinal disorders, and genitourinary disorders (Mushtaq & Najam, 2014).

To explain the low variance in results, it is important to understand the role of other factors present in the complicated process of emotion regulation. Anger, despite being a useful and goal-directed emotion, is appraised as a negative emotion. Expression of anger in a non-culturally suitable manner is generally frowned upon. According to Matsumoto et al. (2009), there are different display rules

regarding individualistic and collectivistic cultures. In individualistic cultures, the development of self and personal goals is given more importance, and anger expression is likely towards the members of the in-group, whereas, in collectivistic cultures, anger expression is usually favored by the out-group (Kamiloglu et al., 2023). In this way, suppressing personal choices is considered a main feature of the collectivistic culture (Song et al., 2021). As anger might threaten the group cohesiveness and the norms of the groups thus, individuals in collectivistic cultures have normalized to suppress their anger (Boiger et al., 2013).

Individuals with attachment avoidance dysregulate their anger, which is according to the proposed hypothesis. Most of the previous research has shown that individuals who are high on avoidance dysregulate their anger as this expression of anger in a non-adaptive manner helps them to achieve distance and separation, which they highly desire (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2023; Chen et al., 2024). Avoidantly attached individuals prefer to maintain an emotional distance from others, and thus, by expressing anger like this, they fulfill their goal of avoiding closeness and intimacy with others (Brenning & Braet, 2013; Springsteen et al., 2023).

No significant association was found between anger integration and attachment dimensions. Integration of anger consists of constructively regulating the emotion and understanding the reasoning behind the emotion and its experience. When anger regulation was compared with respect to age group participants in the age of group of 16 years showed the highest mean compared to other age groups (Yaakobi, 2024). As it involves higher-order cognitive understanding and restructuring, thus, it might be possible that adolescents are still in the primitive phase of developing this strategy (Mc Rae et al., 2012). Moreover, literature has shown that this phase of life is considered a chaotic and difficult time period mostly because the individual is still adjusting physiologically and psychologically, adapting to the changes around him, discovering his identity, and overcoming peer pressure. Thus, integrative regulation may not be observed in the regulation of anger (Skinner & Zimmer Gemback., 2016).

The emotion of fear is very commonly experienced by adolescents, and if not regulated properly, fear is likely to transform into anxiety (Cisler et al., 2009). Individuals with high levels of attachment anxiety tend to dysregulate fear. Based on their need for comfort and belongingness from others, they often express their fears to gain support (Varley et al., 2024). The emotion of fear denotes a need to remain connected due to experiencing vulnerability. Thus, individuals with attachment anxiety, who are already in a state of approval-seeking and fear rejection, tend to show such emotions to establish close relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2023). Attachment avoidance, on the other hand, is associated with fear suppression, indicating that avoidantly attached individuals suppress their fears to maintain emotional distance and lesser contact when they feel fear (Winterheld, 2015).

The number of individuals who endorsed being fearful in the past week was significantly lower compared to those feeling anger. This may be due to fearful experiences not being considered worthy of attention by attachment figures and thus resolved quickly. Additionally, adolescents may be reluctant to endorse fear due to feeling vulnerable or weak (Van Vilerberghe et al., 2023). In a healthy parent-child attachment, the expression of emotion is vital, and children can express their feelings without fear of judgment (Shipman et al.,2007). In insecure relationships, children understand that their emotions will not be attended to (Kim et al., 2021).

Regarding sadness, no significant findings emerged from the data. Despite literature pointing towards intense expressions of sadness in anxiously attached individuals, the data shows that as attachment anxiety increases, sadness suppression also increases. This finding contradicts the hypothesis. In some cultures, the expression of sadness is gender-specific and often unnoticed (Sanders et al., 2013). Most adolescents are reluctant to share their feelings within the family and become aware of their sadness internally. Children who express sadness may feel marginalized (Hourigan et al., 2011). One explanation for the non-significant results could be the lack of substantial data on sadness. This might be due to low endorsement of sadness as an emotion felt in the past week or difficulty in identifying the strategy used to express sadness. Low endorsement of sadness might also indicate that, in some cultures, adolescents express anger rather than sadness when they are hurt (Price et al., 2023). Literature indicates that in close relationships, resentment and conflicts with attachment figures are expressed as subconscious rage rather than sadness (Giulio, 2020).

In the present research, attachment styles seem to be pointing towards a preferred type of emotion regulation; however, It might be possible that other factors account for these explanations. Literature has suggested that anxiously attached individuals face difficulty in managing intense emotions and dysregulated emotions. Moreover, the conceptual framework of Mikulincer and Shaver (2023) also points out the need for attention from significant others displayed by individuals with attachment anxiety. This need for attention and connection coupled with intensity in regulating emotion might be indicative of dysregulation of emotion rather than suppression (Clear et al., 2019). Furthermore, the situation and the context might also be influential in determining the expression of anger. Emotion coaching and emotion socialization practices also determine if an individual will express or suppress anger (Zinsser et al., 2021). However, another perspective closer to the nature of anxiously attached individuals gives some insight into close relationships. Although anxiously attached individuals experience intense anger due to their fear of separation and desperate need for attention from their relationship partner, they hold in their anger and instead direct it on themselves (Bassi et al., 2022). This may further amplify the negative intense feelings by blaming the worth of the individual and doubting their own self, consequently leading to internalizing disorders. (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016).

Other literature also suggests that individuals high in attachment anxiety have a pre-disposition towards rumination and a heightened experience of negative affectivity (Gurdal et al., 2018; Waffa & Pitigala, 2024). This hyper-vigilant manner of experiencing distress

also impedes their confidence levels and their autonomy to handle relationships (Tran & Simpson, 2009). This heightening of emotion allows adolescents with high attachment anxiety to seek support and attention from others. Studies also show that individuals with high attachment anxiety often experience distress as satisfying as it helps them in their goal of attaining intimacy with attachment (Kumashiro & Arriaga, 2020).

Conclusion

Attachment anxiety is associated with a lack of sharing emotions, especially anger, as they fear rejection. Thus, they are likely to cope with non-adaptive ways of dealing with emotional events, but emotions of sadness and fear are dysregulated and expressed openly in anxiously attached individuals as they imply closeness and support from others. Individuals with attachment avoidance tend to dysregulate anger and suppress emotions of sadness and fear that imply support and closeness as they have the goal of withdrawing themselves from others. This study has highlighted some pathways toward a better understanding of the much-established connection between attachment patterns and emotion regulation. The study shows that each individual has a different goal underlying the process of emotion regulation. These goals are significantly predicted by the attachment histories of individuals. These findings assert the need to understand individual emotion management from the perspective of attachment and its social goals rather than surface manifestations.

Implications

These findings have therapeutic implications as well as most of the internalizing disorders are associated with insecure attachment patterns and maladaptive emotion management. In the treatment of psychological disorders, emotions are taken into account, but attachment histories are largely ignored. In such cases where emotional issues stem from underlying attachment histories, management of emotion on a surface level would be insufficient in the long term. Therefore, emotion regulation and coping mechanisms need to be advised, keeping in mind the attachment patterns of an individual and the context of emotion for long-lasting treatment effects.

Limitations

Some limitations of the study should be kept in mind. Firstly, as the study was conducted on a cross-sectional sample thus, the results need to be generalized with caution. Secondly, participating schools were in an urban city; therefore, results cannot be extended to other locations. The tools used in the study were self-report in nature; therefore, a chance of incorrect reporting exists.

Future directions and suggestions

For future studies, the role of contextual factors such as culture and parenting behaviors in explaining the link between attachment and emotion regulation needs to be examined. In the future, the caregiving behaviors of mothers, which are directly influenced by the nature of the mother's own attachment, need to be assessed. In order to gain better insights regarding attachment histories, a mixed-method approach should be used, such as an attachment interview along with self-report measures used for data collection. Moreover, emotion regulation can be studied through vignettes to ensure that adolescents and children have a good idea of how to manage their emotions.

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