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Social Fabric in Struggle: Investigating Attachment Styles and Social Intelligence among Adolescents from Low Socioeconomic Backgrounds

Seema Vinayak, and Jaswant Singh
Panjab University, Chandigarh

Attachment styles play an essential role in forming an individual's personality. How an individual responds to life circumstances delicately relates to the early caregiver's response to their needs. Which in turn shapes the way people perceive their surroundings and communicate with their environment. The current study delves into unravelling the relationship between different attachment styles and the social intelligence of adolescents studying in government schools in Chandigarh. A cohort of 200 students from ages 12 to 18 participated in this study. Standardized scales of Attachment style and Social Intelligence were used. Contrary to our expectations, the findings indicated no correlation between overall social intelligence and different attachment styles. However, a nuanced exploration revealed a correlation between different types of social intelligence and different attachment styles. Additionally the relationship between social intelligence and attachment styles, the current study sheds light on the socioeconomic landscape. Significantly, few students reported a secure attachment style, possibly underscoring socioeconomic factors' potential impact on attachment orientation. This study can be helpful in school settings to implement suitable approaches to help students become more socially open and trusting.

Keywords: Attachment style, Social Intelligence, Adolescents, socioeconomic

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1977) suggests interplay between different systems (Micro, Meso, Exo, Macro, and Chrono). This theory elucidates how an individual's environment affects his development and learning opportunities (Paquette, 2001). Ecological system theory provides more comprehensive understanding to situational circumstances than Erickson's (1950) theory. For instance in Erikson's stages of psychosocial development (Defines eight stages from infancy to adulthood, with each stage presenting a crisis that one must overcome for healthy personality and social development.) Trust vs Mistrust stage suggests only actions of parents, but Bronfenbrenner's Microsystem encompasses financial strains that might propel inconsistencies in behaviour of parents, resulting in insecure attachment. We have attempted to test this theory by evaluating attachment style (primarily developed in Microsystem) and social intelligence (result of Microsystem, Mesosystem, and Macrosystem) of adolescents originating from low-income families.

Attachment style is a strong affective relation that an individual develops towards a particular person: this style once established, influences an individual's cognition, emotion, and behavior throughout their life (Chen Li, 2009). This will further determine their personality and nature of interpersonal relationship they will share with

others. (Fernandes et al., 2019). Consequently, as the child matures, these early attachment patterns pave the way for the development of social intelligence- the ability of an individual to understand and manipulate the social situations effectively for their favour. It is a higher order thinking involving, reasoning, perceiving, problem-solving with respect to social situations . Socially intelligent people have strong observation skills, are perceived tactful, possess "Street Smartness", and tend to learn from their experiences or experiences of others (Goleman, 2006). Social intelligence plays an important role in forming positive connections with others, enhancing self-esteem and mental health of adolescents (Chandran & Nair, 2015).

Adolescents from low-income families face unique challenges that can impact their attachment security and social intelligence. Economic hardships lead to high-stress environments, which may disrupt the formation of secure attachments (Johnson et al., 2018). Parents, preoccupied with financial struggles, might not be able to provide consistent emotional support, leading to feelings of insecurity in adolescents (Russell et al., 2008). This insecure attachment can hinder the development of trust, empathy, and effective communication skills, essential components of social intelligence. Furthermore, limited resources can restrict opportunities for social interaction and learning, such as extracurricular activities or access to diverse social groups. This lack of exposure can result in a narrow understanding of social cues and norms. Additionally, the stress and stigma associated with poverty can lead to social withdrawal and low self-esteem, further impacting social intelligence (Farah et al., 2006); (Jiang, 2020) . Therefore, it's crucial to learn about attachment patterns and social intelligence of adolescents of low-income households.

Eamon (2001) utilizes Bronfenbrenner's process-person-context-time model to explore how economic deprivation impacts children's socioemotional development. It considers multiple ecological environment structures like microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems, and chronosystems. The research emphasizes that poverty influences socioemotional functioning through various processes in family microsystems, peer groups, schools, and broader societal levels, suggesting multifaceted implications for social work practice and policy.

Earlier study by Engels et al. (2001) investigated the connection between social skills and attachment to parents of adolescents. They found that how an adolescent deals with his surrounding, forms relations with friend/romantic partner is associated with his parents (Parental attachment).

A study by Kafetias and Nezlek (2002) provides support to the finding of Engles (2001), they concluded that only securely attached were able to form relationship. The also found higher disclosure and happiness among securely attached people, which is important in making friends or even life partners.

DiTommaso (2003) summarised that relationship between social skills and secure attachment is positive and social skills, correlate negatively with loneliness, providing support to mentioned studies.

Shomaker and Furman (2002) found that the interaction quality an adolescent has with his mother significantly impacts his social skills. Those who found high on negative interaction with mothers were also found high on conflict with peers.

In a study showing connection between home and social intelligence. Terwase et al. (2016) revealed a relationship between

parenting style opted by parents and social intelligence level of their children.

Michaeel et al. (2016) noted that secure and anxious attachment predicts social intelligence. Ghorbarian et al. (2016) found emotional intelligence playing moderating role between Attachment style and Social skills.

Zarrella et al. (2016) stated an implication of practical use of social intelligence. In their study the found pro social behavior to correlate positively with Academic achievements, suggesting teaching students to live harmoniously with their surroundings.

In a latest study by Job et al. (2020) they underscored a new viewpoint. They concluded, the individuals who can understand other's feelings better feel less anxious (one of the factor behind insecurity in relationships).

Jennifer and Vijayan (2021) found no significant relationship between ability to deal skillfully and parental attachment, implying other factors playing a role: such as peer, environment and personality traits.

A very recent study by Hong et al. (2022) highlighted the role of attachment, social skills and environment. They said that a child's relationship with his mother at age 3 predicted his social skills at age 15. This relationship was in turn moderated by neighbourhood cohesion. The sample which was unmarried mothers, their children and neighbourhood suggests further research to find similar results.

Johnson et al. (2018) in their investigation found a significant correlation between lower family income and insecure attachment styles in toddlers. It was observed that children from families living below 150% of the federal poverty limit demonstrated higher stress responses and lower rates of secure attachment, compared to their counterparts from higher-income families.

Wambua et al. (2018) noted that adolescents from low SES backgrounds had higher vulnerable attachment scores than those from middle SES, with males showing higher vulnerability than females. Childhood adversity was also linked to increased vulnerable attachment. There were strong correlations between attachment insecurity and emotional/behavioral issues, including emotional symptoms, conduct problems, and hyperactivity. Overall, lower SES, male gender, and childhood adversity were significantly associated with higher attachment insecurity in adolescents.

Aim

1. To measure the Attachment styles and Social Intelligence among adolescents studying in government schools of Chandigarh.
2. To find out the correlation between attachment styles and social intelligence among adolescents.

Objectives

1. To find out the dominant attachment style of adolescents.
2. To determine the correlation between different attachment styles and social intelligence among adolescents.
3. To find out the correlation of Social Intelligence with different attachment styles

Hypotheses

1. Secure attachment style is expected to be the dominant attachment style among adolescents.
2. There will be a positive correlation between secure attachment and overall social intelligence.
3. There will be no correlation between social intelligence and insecure attachment styles (Dismissive, Fearful, and Preoccupied)

Method

Sample

The sample was collected via purposive sampling from three government schools in Chandigarh. We deliberately selected schools situated near slum areas of Chandigarh to ensure participation of subjects from low income households. Then proper written permission was requested and received from the District Education Officer, sector 19, Chandigarh. After that, appointments were acquired from the principals of concerned schools. For the current research purpose total 200 adolescent students aged 12-18 years (Mean= 15.2), (SD= 1.26) filled the forms. Out of 200 students, 98 girls and 102 boys participated in the study. The minimum age of the participants was 13, and the maximum was 18. These questionnaires were filled in the absence of class teachers during a zero period of school time. The students were informed in advance about the purpose of the research and were instructed about adequate methods to provide responses. The responses were later coded in MS Excel and analysis was conducted using SPSS26 and Jamovi software.

Tools

Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ): This scale was devolved by Van Oudenhoven, Hofstra, and Bakker in 2003. The ASQ is a self-report tool and could be used to figure out the different attachment styles. It consists of a total of four subtypes, i.e., secure attachment, preoccupied attachment, Dismissive attachment, and fearful attachment. The scale consists of 24 items in total. Out of which, secure and preoccupied subscales each have 7 items, and dismissive and fearful subscales each have 5 items. Only two items (8 and 17) are reverse scored; the rest 22 items are directly scored. This measure has a 5-point Likert scale. The Cronbach's alpha for subscales are as follows: secure= 0.75, dismissive= 0.62, fearful= 0.79, and preoccupied=0.8.

Tromso Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS): TSIS was developed by Silvera et al. in 2001. This measure contains a total of 21 questions and measures This scale is comprised of three subscales and each consists of a seven-point Likert scale. The three subscales are; social awareness, social information processing, and social skills. The Cronbach's alpha for all subscales is as follows: social information processing= 0.81, social awareness= 0.79, and social skills= 0.86.

Results

Table 1 showing the number of participants in different levels of social intelligence

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Low Social Intelligence	3	1.5	1.5	1.5
Medium Socia Intelligence	192	96.0	96.0	97.5
High Social Intelligence	5	2.5	2.5	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Discussion

The current study was conducted to gain insights into the lives of children living in low socio-economic households and studying in government schools of Chandigarh. We administered questionnaires measuring attachment styles and social intelligence to adolescents. The hypotheses examined the relationship between attachment styles and social intelligence. We also investigated correlations among the subscales of the aforementioned variables. The results are presented in the Results section.

Table 2: Correlation table for all variables and their sub-scales

Variables	N	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
SI	200	87.35	10.05	1							
SA	200	24.00	6.27	.40**	1						
SS	200	28.90	6.43	.68**	.06	1					
SIP	200	34.46	6.89	.45**	-.38**	.01	1				
Sec	200	3.30	0.66	.12	-.19**	.25**	.11	1			
Fear	200	3.25	0.67	-.09	-.22**	-.26**	.31**	.02	1		
Preo	200	3.12	0.68	-.13	-.21**	-.13	.11	.12	.27**	1	
Dis	200	3.86	0.60	.05	-.16**	-.02	.25**	-.09	.19**	-.06	1

SI= Social Intelligence, SA= Social Awareness, = Social Skills, SIP= Social Information Processing, Sec= Secure attachment, Fear= Fearful Attachment, Preo= Preoccupied Attachment.

Table 3. Independent Samples T-Test

		Statistic	df	p
secure	Student's t	-1.224	198	0.222
dismissive	Student's t	0.638	198	0.524
preoccupied	Student's t	0.387	198	0.699
fearful	Student's t	1.832	198	0.068
sip	Student's t	1.544*	198	0.124
SS	Student's t	-0.818	198	0.414
SA	Student's t	-0.655	198	0.514
SI	Student's t	0.122	198	0.903

Note. H ì $_{female}$ “ ì $_{male}$

C” Levene's test is significant (p < .05), suggesting a violation of the assumption of equal variancesNote= SIP= Social Information Processing, SS= Social Skills, SA= Social Awareness, SI= Social Intelligence.

Upon scoring and interpreting the scores, we found that out of 200 adolescents, only 42 were securely attached to their parents and individuals in their close relationships, while the remaining 158 exhibited insecure attachment (Dismissive = 110, Fearful = 21, and Preoccupied = 27). This implied that a merely 21 percent of subjects were securely attached which is indicative of positive development trajectory. This finding rejected our first hypothesis regarding predominant attachment style.

Only one in ten adolescents was capable of trusting and finding comfort in close family and peers, and of seeking guidance when needed. These securely attached individuals are more likely to form healthy, positive relationships, and have better prospects for a successful romantic relationship in the future (Engles et al., 2001; Santona et al., 2019). Previous researchers have documented the positive association between psychological health and secure attachment (Dermirtas, 2019). However, with only one in ten adolescents falling in this category, concern arise regarding the emotional development of the remaining nine. Our findings indicate that 55 percent displayed a dismissive attachment style, characterized by discomfort in close relationships, an avoidance of emotional closeness, and a lack of empathy. Consequently they may suffer from low self-esteem, which has been linked

to academic performance. (Ciarrochi et al., 2007) .

Furthermore 10.5 % of participants exhibited a fearful attachment style, characterized by a fear of being hurt in close relationships coupled with a strong desire for emotional intimacy. These individuals often give mixed signals, leading to confusion among their peers about their emotional needs. Research documented that this behaviour is due to low self-worth (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Finally, 13.5% showed a preoccupied attachment style- these adolescents are constantly worried about their relationships with caregivers or peers. They tend to blame themselves for not being accepted by others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

We hypothesized a positive relationship between social intelligence and secure attachment among adolescents, suggesting that individuals who are securely attached to those close to them are better at dealing and managing social situations effectively and to forming positive relationships with their surroundings. Our second hypothesis is rejected as we did not find a significant correlation between the two. This finding is inconsistent with other studies that have found a relationship between social intelligence and secure attachment (Hamarta et al. 2009; Michaeel et al., 2016). Even though we found no significant relationship between secure attachment and overall social intelligence, we did find some relationship between secure attachment and two out of three subscales of social intelligence. A positive significant low correlation was found between secure attachment and social skills. This states that these securely attached students are also somewhat proficient in dealing with problems associated with social situations. They can bond reasonably with their peers (Engels et al. 2001; Michaeel et al., 2016). Anwer et al. (2017) found a positive relationship between secure attachment and social intelligence among young adults. Even though they had used the same measure to assess social intelligence, they did not study the relationship between subscales of social intelligence and secure attachment. Second, we found a negative significant but low correlation between secure attachment and social awareness among our sample. From an attachment theory perspective, this is inconsistent with the theory as it implies that the more securely one is attached to one's parents, the less socially aware that individual is. This seems counterintuitive, but as our cohort is in the developing stage and belongs to a social class characterized by deficiency in assets, it could be explained with logic. Since people from one class generally associate with others from the same class only, it could lead to limited social awareness. Apart from mentioned possible explanation, this study is conducted in post covid era. And researchers have found that the pandemics have long term impacts on children and adolescents (Schlack et al., 2020). One such hidden impact could be associated with the financial difficulties faces by people during covid lockdowns. Financially challenged parents struggle to fulfil wishes of their children in general (Russell et al., 2008). In more restricted environment due to lockdown they faced higher degree of difficulties in providing for the families which in turn could have negative impact on their children's perception of their parents as a source of security (Bahl et al., 2021).

Next, consistent with our prediction, we found no relationship between social intelligence and fearful, dismissive, and preoccupied attachment styles. Thus, our Third hypothesis is accepted. Our findings are similar to those of Hamarta et al. (2009), who noted that these insecurely attached individuals tend to downplay others and give importance to themselves only. Therefore, they aren't expected to form healthy relations

and possess effective skills necessary for public dealing. Viewing this finding from attachment theory lens it could be assumed due to deactivation of exploration behaviour due to insecure attachment (Bowlby, 1969).

Upon analysis of the subscales of social intelligence, we found that, overall, 192 adolescents scored in the medium range on social intelligence. Previous researchers have noted that social intelligence positively correlates with age (Ali et al., 2019; Calin et al., 2022). Therefore, it could be postulated that these students have the potential to achieve higher levels of social intelligence over time and with experience. Further analysis revealed that within our sample, 77 adolescents scored low, 115 scored in the medium range, and only 8 scored high on social awareness. This suggests that more than one-third of our sample may be inefficient at decoding social cues related to the moods and emotions of those around them. Previous research has established that childhood adversities, such as a lack of resources, are adversely linked to mental health outcomes (Nelson et al., 2020).

The students performed well on the social information processing; only 9 scored low, 101 medium, and 90 high in this category. Scoring high on this subscale indicate that these adolescents are able to understand verbal and non-verbal communication in an effective manner.

We also calculated t-test to check gender differences in terms of attachment styles and social intelligence and found no difference opposite to findings of (Chopik et al., 2013; Kanimozhi & Vasimalairaja, 2020). This implies that these findings can be generalized to boys and girls both.

Strengths of the study

The current study sheds light on adolescents' attachment styles from low-income households, explores their engagement and challenges with their environment, and reveals their significant lack of secure attachment, potentially leading to imminent social and psychological challenges. This study also gives support to the connection between socioeconomic status, attachment style, and social intelligence. Social intelligence, especially social awareness, is lacking in these adolescents. It is a significant discovery as these subjects are at an age when they socialize more and relate to peers more than their own families. Lacking in awareness about their surroundings, emotions, and feelings of people around them can hinder their socialization process and even future romantic relationships. All this information can provide a solid base to the administration system to provide adequate support to students living in financially challenged households and train counsellors in government schools to help these adolescents to inculcate skills associated with social and emotional intelligence, as unlike Intelligence, Social and emotional intelligence can be learned and plays a more important role in the success of an individual. Finally this study also provides support to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1977): That a child's environment plays an important role in his psychological development.

Limitations of the study

A qualitative approach such as an interview could have provide more in-depth information. Limitation on time provided by school have resulted in opting for questionnaires with lesser items. A larger sample could have provided a more robust findings. As this data is from adolescents in a government school, this is hard to generalize on adolescent studying in private or convent schools. Similarly, these findings might not be appropriate to generalize to

adolescents belonging to different socio-economic status. Due to time restriction, we were unable to fetch information related to exact financial background of the participants.

Future suggestions

To be more accurate about the financial standing of the subject, some financial status scale could be utilized. Children from working and non-working mother household could be identified and included in such study. A comparative study with similar methodology to compare adolescents from different types of schools can provide a proper standing of adolescents on attachment & social intelligence in Indian context.

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Seema Vinayak, Professor, Department of Psychology, Panjab University Chandigarh

Jaswant Singh, Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, Panjab University, Chandigarh,