

Attachment Styles and Emotion Regulation: Mediating Effect of Personality

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Emotions and Emotion Regulation are central aspects of an individual's life. There are several factors which influences the development and regulation of emotions (DER). This study investigated the mediating role of personality amid attachment styles and difficulties in emotion regulation. Sample of the study were adolescents (N=293) studying in different schools of Delhi. The tools used were Measure of Attachment Styles (Ahmed, Jahan, & Imtiaz, 2016), Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale Short-Form by Kaufman, et al. (2015) and Big Five Inventory (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991). Obtained scores were analysed using parallel mediation analysis, results revealed that only the agreeableness dimension of big five personality mediates the relationship between secure attachment style and difficulties in emotion regulation. On the other hand, ambivalent attachment style was directly related to difficulties in emotion regulation and indirectly through neuroticism. The finding not only adds to the literature but suggests the importance of parent child relationship and of early childhood experiences.

Keywords: Attachment styles, Emotion Regulation, Personality.

Emotion regulation fundamental to human development and relationships. (Langlois, 2004). Adolescents is a crucial stage in an individual life and is marked by major physical and psychosocial changes as the individual makes a transition from child to adult and one of important aspect of development during this period is ones abilities to appropriately regulate positive and negative emotions in social, educational, and professional milieus as emotional experiences play a crucial role in an person's life. Priory, there has been emotion regulation has emerged as an important factor, it refers to individuals' deliberately instigating, escaping, constraining, keeping, or balancing the event, structure, amount, or period of inner sentiments, emotionally allied bodily states, attentiveness, and impulsive circumstances of emotion to accomplish one's ambitions. (Eisenberg, Morris, & Spinrad, 2005).

As posited in the classic attachment theory by Bowlby (1969), the relationship between parent/caregiver and child serves as a building block for socioemotional and behavioural development patterns throughout life. Based on this theory, Ainsworth and her colleagues

(1978) developed a system for identification of the individual differences in mother-child relationship by conducting laboratory experiment called strange situation the findings of this experiment resulted in two broad forms attachment styles namely securely attached and insecurely attached (further classified into anxious-ambivalent and avoidant). Attachment especially during adolescents is regarded as a key phase as children grow, they gain more autonomy, communal interactions increases and peers play a more salient role leading to an increased need for self-regulation and relying on efficient regulation of emotions, though the caregivers /parents still remain to serve both as safe havens and secure bases in the phases of stress promoting the child's need for exploration (Bowlby, 1988). Initial interactions (level of closeness to, protection and support from parents, and parent's reciprocity and engagement) provides the cognitive framework for later social relationships this framework eventually influences the development of inner working models, which includes views about coping abilities, distress, emotion regulation strategies and representations about worlds safety (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). Attachment

security (Primary Attachment strategies) is set apart by trust in others, comfort with closeness and capacity to manage stressors and effective dealing with threats (Mikulincer, Shaver, & Pereg, 2003). Even in the absence of attachment figure and lack of social support inner working models of a securely attached individual allows them to continue to sustain optimism and sense of self efficacy (Sroufe & Waters, 1977). However, in the case of inconsistent and unreliable support and protection, children tend to develop secondary attachment strategies i.e. (i) deactivation of the attachment system (avoidance attachment) which involves down-regulating emotions and is characterised by suppression of the negative emotions and avoiding others in the phases of stress as close relationships can be stressful for them and this results in inability to self-disclose and showing feelings of warmth for others (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005) and (ii) hyperactivation of attachment system (ambivalent anxious) marked by upregulation of emotions and is exemplified emotional overreaction and increased attention seeking from others in periods of stress as one considers themselves to be incompetent at regulating emotions which leads to further dependency on others (Wei, Mallinckrodt, Larson, & Zakalik, 2005).

Apart from attachment styles, personality is one of the major contributors to the socio-emotional development of an individual. Personality refers one's affinities to act, contemplate, and sense in firm ways which are consistent in nature (Shiner & Caspi, 2003). Personality traits are often considered to be the product of genetic and environmental factors and is not perceived as subsequent of communal exchanges (Caspi & Shiner, 2006). There are several theories of personality but over the years, there has been a broad consensus over the five-factor structure of personality or the Big Five (Ehrler, Evans, & McGhee, 1999). This model includes five distinct traits namely extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness. Extroversion is characterised as a higher degree of sociability, assertiveness, talkativeness, and self-confidence. Agreeableness is depicted by being helpful, cooperative, and sympathetic

toward others. Neuroticism is exemplified by degree of emotional stability, and anxiety, depression, and anger. Openness refers to intellect and broadness of cultural interests, fantasy, and creativity. Finally, conscientiousness is typified by being disciplined, organized, and achievement-oriented (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Several studies have linked the big five with important developmental outcomes such as adjustment, risk behaviours, conduct problems and psychopathology among children and youngsters (Jensen-Campbell, et al., 2002). As highlighted in numerous studies, emotion regulation has been allied to numerous attributes of personality. Individual differs in their capabilities to detect, access and engage in regulate emotions (Cole, Michel, & Teti, 1994) and these differences predisposes them to react to situations in certain ways. Empirical evidences in this area have linked neuroticism with emotion dysregulation and a positive association have been found between extraversion and emotion regulation (Timmermans, Van Mechelen, & Nezelek, 2009).

While intrinsic factors such as personality play a salient role in regulation of emotions. Contemporary models suggest an interplay of both intrinsic and extrinsic factors (attachment styles) in emotion regulation capabilities. As rooted in Diathesis stress models (Monroe & Simons, 1991) individuals with susceptible personality traits are more prone to the adverse parenting effects. Similarly, Differential Susceptibility hypothesis also echoes the differences in children's responses to parenting, it states that children with predisposed personality are not only more prone to negative impact of parenting but would also benefit from positive parenting or from the absence of negative one (Belsky, 1997).

As highlighted by empirical evidences, a substantial relationship between attachment styles, personality and emotion regulation was found. To the top of our understanding, there has been no research which examines the interplay of both attachment styles and personality on difficulties in emotion regulation. Given the lack of researches in this area, the current study inspected the mediational role of big five personality in the relationship between attachment styles and difficulties in emotion regulation among adolescents.

Objectives

To examine Big Five Personality as a mediator of the relationship between attachment styles (secure, ambivalent and avoidant) and difficulties in emotion regulation (DER).

Hypothesis

The big five personality dimensions would significantly mediate the relationship between attachment styles (secure, ambivalent and avoidant) and difficulties in emotion regulation (DER).

Method

Sample:

293 adolescents (143 males and 150 females) were selected on the basis of random sampling. Subjects taken for the sample were students of class 9th to 12th studying in various schools of Delhi.

Tools:

Measure of Attachment Styles (MAOS): consisted of 27 items which measures perceived attachment styles covering secure attachment (8 items), Avoidant attachment (10 items) and Ambivalent attachment (9 items). The higher score shows the dominant attachment pattern (Ahmed, Jahan, & Imtiaz, 2016).

Big Five Inventory (BFI): Developed by John, Donahue, & Kentle (1991) consisted of 44 items measures scores across five broad dimensions Extroversion (8 items), Agreeableness (9 items), Conscientiousness (9 items), Neuroticism (8 items) and Openness (10 items) by employing a 5-point Likert scale.

Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale-Short Form (DERS-SF): This 18 item scale developed by Kaufman and colleagues (2015) consists of 6 subscales namely 1) awareness and understanding of emotional responses, 2) acceptance of emotions, 3) the ability to control impulsive behaviors when experiencing negative emotions, 4) the ability to employ situationally appropriate emotion regulation strategies to meet one's goals, 5) the ability to engage in goal-directed behavior while experiencing negative emotions, and 6) the extent to which one is clear about which emotions one is experiencing. For the present study only, total score was used.

Ethical Concerns:

Written informed consent was obtained from the participants as well as from the school authorities. They were assured of the confidentiality. The participation to the study was entirely voluntary and were also briefed about the nature and objectives of the research.

Procedure:

Rapport was formed with the participants followed by data collection. Uniform Instructions were given regarding the completion of questionnaire. Participants took an average of 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire and faced no problems in understanding the language of the questionnaire. Queries of the respondents were also addressed.

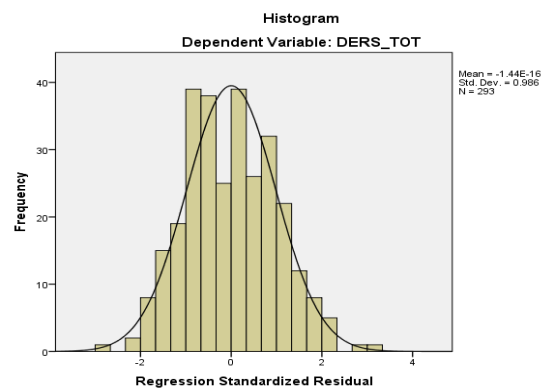


Figure I

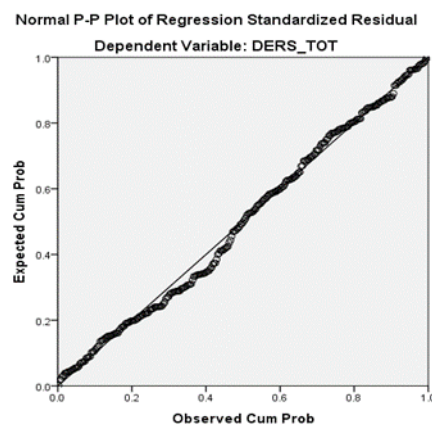


Figure II

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, alpha reliabilities and correlation matrix for all the variables N=293.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	α	M	SD
1 Extro	--	.13*	.33**	-.22**	.16**	.26**	-.06	-.23**	-.17**	.60	26.62	4.7
2 Agree	--	--	.31**	-.16**	.32**	.18**	.01	-.06	-.28**	.65	31.79	5.09
3 Conci	--	--	--	-.30**	.12*	.08	-.12*	-.09	-.32**	.65	28.88	5.10
4 Neuro	--	--	--	--	.18**	-.10	.44**	.01	.48**	.67	24.27	5.56
5 Open	--	--	--	--	--	.01	.13*	-.05	-.08	.66	35.02	4.54
6 Sec_A	--	--	--	--	--	--	-.02	-.35**	-.16**	.68	27.76	4.78
7 Am_A	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	-.06	.29**	.64	28.69	5.63
8 Av_A	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.11	.61	25.47	4.79
9 Der	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	.79	48.97	11.13

Note. 1=Extroversion; 2=Agreeableness; 3=Conscientiousness; 4=Neuroticism; 5=Openness; 6=Secure Attachment Style; 7 = Ambivalent-Insecure Attachment Style; 8=Avoidant-Insecure Attachment Style; 9=Difficulties in emotion Regulation. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Results

Statistical analysis was carried out using SPSS 22.0, before proceeding with analysis, normality of the data was checked. Histogram generated (figure I) by regressing attachment styles (dimensions) and personality on difficulties in emotion regulation (DER) turns out to be fairly symmetrical indicating normal distribution of residuals with no extreme outliers. Linearity in normal probability plot (figure II) suggests that the error terms are normally distributed.

Table I shows the mean, standard deviations and alpha coefficients of all the variables analysed under the study. Alpha coefficients for all the scales and subscales ranged between .60 to .79 indicating an acceptable level of internal consistency index. Correlation matrix revealed a significant relationship between difficulties of emotion regulation with dimensions of personality as well as attachment styles except for openness and avoidant insecure attachment styles. Secure attachment style positively correlated with Extroversion and Agreeableness. Ambivalent insecure attachment style was negatively correlated with conscientiousness and positively with neuroticism. A significant negative correlation was observed between extroversion

and Avoidant insecure attachment style. For establishing the criteria for mediation as suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986) multiple regression analysis was carried out to check whether (1) attachment styles predicted personality (2) personality predicted DER (3) attachment styles predicted DER.

Table 2. Multiple Regression analysis results (N=293)

Attachment styles predicting DER		
DER	$R^2 = .120$	Sec_A ($\beta = -.123$), Am_A ($\beta = .301$)
Attachment styles predicting Personality		
Extro	$R^2 = .097$	Sec_A ($\beta = .200$), Av_A ($\beta = -.172$)
Agree	$R^2 = .033$	Sec_A ($\beta = .183$)
Consci	$R^2 = .029$	Am_A ($\beta = -.129$)
Neuro	$R^2 = .203$	Sec_A ($\beta = -.096$), Am_A ($\beta = .437$)
open	$R^2 = .020$	Am_A ($\beta = -.134$)
Personality predicting DER		
DER	$R^2 = .303$	Agree ($\beta = -.146$), Conci ($\beta = -.130$), Neuro ($\beta = .438$)

NOTE. SEC_A=Secure attachment style, Am_A= Ambivalent attachment style, Av_A=Avoidant attachment style, only significant predictions shown, $p < .05$

Results (Table II) revealed that while Secure Attachment style significantly predicted extroversion, agreeableness and neuroticism, Ambivalent insecure attachment style predicted Conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness. On the other hand, Avoidant attachment style negatively predicted extroversion. DER was significantly predicted by secure attachment style, ambivalent insecure attachment style, agreeableness, conscientiousness and neuroticism.

For conducting Parallel mediation analysis, PROCESS macro version 3.2.01 for SPSS created by Hayes (2018) was used. Parallel mediation, allows to test two or more mediators together and to account the shared variance between them (Hayes, 2018). For the present study three parallel mediations analysis

were conducted using process template of model 4.

Secure Attachment Style, Personality and DER

Findings of the study revealed that (Table III; Model 1), Secure attachment style significantly predicted Extraversion (a1) and Agreeableness (a2) and DER was significantly predicted by Agreeableness (b2), Conscientiousness (b3), Neuroticism (b4) and Openness (b5). Further, it indicated that the total effect was significant ($c = -.3779$, $p < .05$). On the other hand, direct effect ($c' = -.2044$) non-significant Indirect effects were obtained using Bootstrapping method (5000), findings show that indirect effect total (coeff. = $-.1735$; LLCI-ULCI = $-.3711$ to $.0207$) were found to be non-significant. Specific effect of Agreeableness was found to be significant (coeff. = $-.0545$; LLCI-ULCI = $-.1283$ to $-.0017$) Overall, Results for Model 1 revealed full mediation.

Table III. Parallel Mediation Analysis Results

Model	M1		M2		M3		M4		M5		Total Effect C	Direct Effect C'	Indirect Effect	Specific Effect
	a ₁	b ₁	a ₂	b ₂	a ₃	b ₃	a ₄	b ₄	a ₅	b ₅				
1 Sec_A	.2602*	-.0653	.1938*	-.2815*	.0931	-.2949*	-.1220	.8738*	.0068	-.2743*	-.3779*	-.2044	-.1735 LLCI = -.3711 ULCI = .0207	M2 -.0545 LLCI = -.1283 ULCI = -.0017
2 Am_A	-.0508	-.0003	.0104	-.3405*	-.1133*	-.2764*	.4350*	.7538*	.1102*	-.2645*	.5896*	.2611*	.3289 LLCI = .1863 ULCI = .4858	M4 .3299 LLCI = .2101 ULCI = .4614 C3, C6, C8, C9, C10
3 Av_A	-.2349*	.0646	-.0682	-.3090*	-.0987	-.2795*	.0055	.8912*	-.0482	-.2589	.2603	.2192	.0411 LLCI = -.1245 ULCI = .2197	----

Note. Sec_A=Secure Attachment, Am_A=Ambivalent Attachment Style, Av_A=Avoidant Attachment Style, M1=Extraversion, M2=Agreeableness, M3=Conscientiousness, M4=Neuroticism, M5=Openness, a_n=path coefficients from X to M, b_n=path coefficients from M to Y, C_n=Pairwise contrast, * $p < .05$

Ambivalent Attachment Style, Personality and DER

Mediation Analysis results indicated that (Table III; Model 2), Ambivalent attachment style significantly predicted Conscientiousness(a3), Neuroticism(a4) and Openness(a5) and DER was significantly predicted by Agreeableness(b2), Conscientiousness(b3), Neuroticism(b4) and Openness(b5). The total effect ($c = .5896$; $p < .05$) direct effect ($c' = .2611$; $p < .05$) and indirect effect total (coeff. = .3289; LLCI-ULCI = .1863 to .4858) were found significant. Specific effect of Neuroticism was found to be significant (coeff. = .3299; LLCI-ULCI = .2101 to .4614) With significant pairwise contrast of the following C3(Extraversion-Neuroticism) = -.3299 (LLCI-ULCI = -.4628 to -.2063), C6(Agreeableness-Neuroticism) = -.3334 (LLCI-ULCI = -.4675 to -.2058), C8(Conscientiousness – Neuroticism) = -.2986 (LLCI-ULCI = -.4316 to -.1681), C9 (Conscientiousness – openness) = .0604 (LLCI-ULCI = .0116 to .1237) and C10 (Neuroticism – openness) = .3590 (LLCI-ULCI = .2238 to .5040) Overall, Results for Model 2 revealed partial mediation.

Avoidant Attachment Style, Personality and DER

As indicated by Table III (Model 3), Avoidant attachment style significantly predicted Extraversion (a1) DER was significantly predicted by Conscientiousness(b3) and Neuroticism(b4) The total effect ($c = .2603$) direct effect ($c' = .2192$) and indirect effect total (coeff. = .0411; LLCI-ULCI = -.1245 to .2197) were found to be non-significant. To summarise, Results for Model 3 revealed no mediation.

Discussion

The goal of this enquiry was to assay the mediation effect of personality on the link between attachment styles (dimensions) and DER. Path coefficient results revealed that, Secure attachment style came across as a positive predictor of Extraversion and Agreeableness on the contrary Agreeableness was discovered to be predicted negatively by Avoidant Attachment style. The results are supported by previous findings which have suggested that Secure attachment with elevated levels of Extroversion

and Agreeableness and with reduced levels in case of insecure attachment style. (Shaver & Brennan, 1992). DER was negatively predicted by Secure Attachment style. Conceptually, People with secure attachment styles have positive working models which are resultant of repeated and consistent interactions with caregivers who are sensitive and flexible encouraging child to express their emotions openly and to teach them to cope effectively with negative emotions this co-regulation provides the psychological foundations to develop effective emotion regulation strategies as they grow old (Contreras & Kerns, 2000). Previous studies shows that securely attached children report better emotional awareness (Brumariu, Kerns, & Seibert, 2012) and have better emotion regulation knowledge as compared to insecurely attached individuals (Colle & Del Giudice, 2011). Total effect is one which we obtain by simply regressing independent variable (IV; secure attachment style in this case) on dependent variable (DV; DER), total effect was found to be negatively significant which implies that people who were above average on secure attachment are disposed to less difficulties in emotion regulation as compared to low scorers. Direct effect is obtained by regressing IV on DV while controlling M (mediator; personality dimensions) and it was found to be non-significant, indicating the presence of mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Indirect effect total, is the sum of all the indirect effects, in this case it did not differ from zero. However, as suggested by Hayes (2018) in the case of multiple mediations, indirect effects are of much less considerations as compared to specific indirect effects, which are obtained by controlling the effect of other mediators, results revealed that indirect effect of agreeableness to be negatively significant which signifies that securely attached individuals who are also high on agreeableness tend to experience less emotion regulation difficulties.

Ambivalent attachment style positively predicted neuroticism and openness and negatively conscientiousness, as both ambivalent attachment style and neuroticism are forms of insecurity. This style of attachment has been linked empirically with depression, vulnerability and anxiety facets of neuroticism

(Shaver & Brennan, 1992). As suggested by literature, ambivalent attachment occurs due to unreliable parental care making child vigilant and vulnerable leading to high neuroticism (Thompson, 1999). Ambivalent attachment style was found to be positively linked with DER, as echoed in previous studies insecure attachment style is associated with elevated levels of negative affect (Simpson, 1990). Insecurely attached individuals are more susceptible to negative experiences of emotions due to inconsistent interactions with care providers (Bowlby, 1988). Results of mediation analysis revealed, both total effect (c) and direct effect (c') to be positively significant, which implies that ambivalent-insecure adolescents have more difficulties in emotion regulation. However, in this case the estimate of direct effect was lower than the estimate of indirect effect indicating partial mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Indirect effect total in this case was found to be differing from zero signifying that ambivalent attachment is indirectly related to DER. Moreover specific indirect analysis revealed indirect effect of neuroticism, i.e. Ambivalent-insecure adolescents who score high on neuroticism tend to face greater emotion regulation difficulties. Strength of indirect effect was evaluated using Pairwise contrast which revealed that effect via neuroticism was greater than openness, agreeableness, extraversion and conscientiousness respectively.

No mediation was found in model 3, in which mediational role of personality was examined in the relationship between avoidant attachment style and DER. The results were in contrast with previous findings which states that insecure attachment promotes emotion regulation difficulties. There could be several factors influencing the findings however these factors are beyond the scope of present research.

DER was positively predicted by Neuroticism and negatively by agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness. According to researches, each of the five factors on average influences individuals' dispositional tendencies to thought, feelings and actions (Cervone, Shadel, & Jencius, 2001). Neuroticism is characterised by anxiety, personal insecurity, etc. People with

high scores on neuroticism are more likely to experience more stress and emotion instability. High scorers on agreeableness on the other hand are more social and have concerns for others, they tend to establish emotional closeness with others, helping them gain emotional support. Openness and conscientiousness makes individual more open to experiences, disciplined and careful. All these three factors have been shown to buffer the effect of negative emotions and promotes emotion regulation and coping strategies (Shaver & Brennan, 1992).

Conclusions

The findings of the study provide support to the previous researches which suggest that both intrinsic as well as extrinsic factors crucial role in the development as well as in the regulation of emotion strategies. It strengthens the fact that early childhood experiences provide a foundational base to overall development of the individuals. It is therefore important to develop interventions and techniques which helps to improve parent child interactions and emotion regulation and coping strategies. The present study was limited to Delhi schools only and involved self-report questionnaires filled by participants. Future researches can be directed at a larger sample which can involve parental ratings and can further classify population on the basis of gender, age and other socio-demographic factors.

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