

## An Investigation of Predictive Marital Adjustment Base of Attachment Styles in Iranian Married Women

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Current figures indicate that many of first marriages in Iran will end in separation or divorce due to many problems, one of these causes of this phenomenon is a marital adjustment. Marital adjustment denotes emotional stability, intellectual efficiency, social effectiveness people and acts as a fundamental contributor to the health and development of family members. One of the most important factors influencing marital adjustment is attachment styles. This study aimed to determine the relationship between attachment styles and marital adjustment in women.

**Methods:** This cross-sectional study was conducted on 220 women referring to counselling centers in 2016. The participants were selected via available sampling. The data collection instruments consisted of two standardized questionnaires include Spanier's marital adjustment (1976), and Collins and Read's Adult Attachment Style Scale. The data were analyzed in SPSS software (version 19) using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficient, and stepwise regression analysis, regression equation.

**Results:** The attachment styles were predictors of marital adjustment. There was a significant negative correlation between marital adjustment, anxious and avoidant attachment styles while the correlation between marital adjustment and secure attachment style was significantly positive.

**Conclusion:** The results showed that the early relationship within the family environment supports a certain attachment style and the effects of the avoidant insecure and ambivalent insecure styles affect the interpersonal relations of the couples in adulthood. As attachment styles are contributory to marital adjustment, counselors can build on couple therapy approach to have an effective role in modifying attachment styles of the couple and solving their conflicts both before and after marriage.

**Keywords:** Attachment Styles, Marital Adjustment, Women

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### Introduction

Marriage is the most important event in a person's life cycle, in which couples are placed in a two-way relationship with a spouse. This relationship is the most important relationship of each person's life. Interaction is an inseparable part of spousal relationships, such as human relationship, and marital adjustment is one of the criteria for the success of couples' interaction<sup>(1)</sup>.

In expressing the importance of the quality of marital affluence, it should be pointed out that in South and Krueger's research<sup>(2)</sup> the quality of marital relationship by influencing the genetic structure of a person can increase or decrease physical health. Indeed, when marital satisfaction is reduced, the likelihood of conflicts, emotional frustration and aggression between them increases. The tension between relationships and disturbances create physical and psychological distress and their level of health decreases. Conversely, when couples have a high degree of marital satisfaction, due to constructive exchanges and support that they receive from each other, their general health is expected to increase.

Marital adjustment denotes emotional stability, intellectual efficiency and social effectiveness. Marital adjustment can be considered as the state in which there is an overall feeling in husband and wife of happiness and satisfaction with their marriage and with each other. Marital adjustment calls for maturity that accepts and understands growth and development in the spouse. If this growth is not experienced and realized fully, death in marital relationship is inevitable<sup>(3)</sup>. According to Griff and Bruno, adjusted couples are married couples who have a great deal of agreement and are well placed to manage their time and financial issues. On the other hand, marital incompatibility means dissatisfaction, lack of sense of happiness, and disagreement in decision making. In fact, the problem of marital incompatibility is more likely to lead to referrals for health and mental health services<sup>(4)</sup>. This influences family functioning and adversely affects the child's personality. Therefore, an individual's satisfaction with marriage constitutes his/her satisfaction with the

family and his/her overall satisfaction with life<sup>(5, 6)</sup>. As marital relationship should be based on love, cooperation, compassion, understanding, forgiveness, and bilateral sacrifice of the couple, it seems that attachment style is a major contributor to marital adjustment— which is shaped in one's childhood and continues to shape thereafter according to the environment wherein one grows<sup>(7, 8)</sup>.

The attachment styles are related to not only close relationships and the adaptation process in adulthood, but also to people's Subjective Well-Being and Subjective Quality of Life that include positive mood, vitality and interest in different fields. In other words, the attachment theory offers a strong framework for a better understanding of individual differences in the process of adaptation in adulthood; the attachment styles are related to not only close relationships and the adaptation process in adulthood<sup>(9)</sup>. Attachment is a mutual emotional bond that can establish security and determine a person's mental health<sup>(3, 8-10)</sup>. Studies focused on developmental pathology indicate associations between early negative experiences in academic, familial, and adulthood backgrounds, psychological problems, and impaired marital networks<sup>(5, 11)</sup>. According to<sup>(12)</sup> adults with anxiety attachment style have a more pessimistic perspective on relationships, themselves and others and those with anxious-ambivalent style have a negative attitude toward themselves. While adults with the secure attachment style have a positive feeling to themselves and a positive perception of others, and are more confident and successful in society. Adults with dismissive-avoidant attachment style view themselves as self-sufficient and tend to reject vulnerability, claiming that they do not require close relationships and avoid intimacy<sup>(13)</sup>. Adults with anxious-preoccupied attachment type also tend to have less positive views about themselves. They often doubt their worth as a spouse and often blame themselves for the attachment figure's lack of responsiveness<sup>(14)</sup>. Study the attachment styles and marital adjustment show that insecure attachment to be an effective

predictor of couple maladjustment and subjects with the secure attachment style have lower levels of marital and interpersonal problems as well as greater happiness than subjects with avoidant and anxious attachment styles<sup>(5, 9, 15)</sup>.

Given the importance of marital adjustment in family functioning, this survey aimed to discuss the association between attachment styles and marital adjustment among married women referring to the counselling centers of Yazd city. The results can help take preliminary steps towards establishing healthy and constructive marital relationship between spouses. It can contribute to family stability and solidity and help specify attachment styles of people before marriage in order to orient them to secure attachment style.

## Methods

This descriptive, analytic study was conducted in 2016 on 206 women referring to health centers of Yazd city. Participants were selected via available sampling. The inclusion criteria consisted of being a woman, married, literate to read and write. To collect data, the participants completed Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire (DAS), and Collins and Read's standard Adult Attachment Style Survey through self-report<sup>(16, 17)</sup>.

The research method is a correlation coefficient that has been developed to find the relationship between attachment styles and marital adjustment and predict the marital adjustment and attempt to determine the nature of the relationship between the predictive variable (attachment styles) and the criterion variable (marital adjustment). The statistical population is 18 - 60 years old women in Yazd, who are 172,256 people according to official statistics of the Population and Housing Census in 2016. 220 people were selected through an available sampling method which was reduced to 206 by elimination of incomplete questionnaires. The reason for choosing this sample size is that, according to Hooman<sup>(18)</sup> the size of the sample group should be at least 100 in the regression and correlation studies. Since the present study considered and a larger sample size was considered for increasing the external

credibility of the research and reducing the disturbing factors. Entry requirement is living with spouse at least starting from 1 year ago and living together at the moment. Ethical code was participants' satisfaction, secrecy and all subjects knew that no one else would have access to data which researcher collected from them.

Data were analyzed by descriptive and inferential statistics. In the descriptive data, Descriptive Statistics such as mean, standard deviation, etc. were showed and at the inferential Statistics, Pearson correlation coefficient and regression were showed. Data were analyzed using SPSS software.

In the present study, Collins and Read's Adult Attachment Style Scale was used to evaluate attachment styles. The questionnaire was emerged in 1990 by Collins and Read and was subsequently revised by them in 1996. Attachment theory is the theoretical foundation of this test. The scale examines the way an individual assesses his/her communication skills and style of intimate relationship. It contains 18 items where the respondents express their agreement or disagreement on a 5-point Likert scale. The scale consists of three subscales: Depend (D) measures the extent to which an individual takes confidence in and relies on others, Close (C) measures the extent to which an individual is intimate with and emotionally close to others, and Anxiety subscale (A) measures the extent to which an individual is worried about being rejected or abandoned by others. Each subscale contains 6 items. The test-retest reliability coefficient of this scale for each of the three subscales of Close, Depend, and Anxiety are reported as 0.68, 0.71 and 0.52, respectively. In Iran, the reliability of the scale using test-retest in terms of correlation between two runs on a sample size of 100 subjects within one month indicated no significant difference between the two administrations for A, D and C subscales in RASS. The reliability coefficient was 0.95<sup>(19)</sup>.

Dyadic Adjustment Scales (DASS): This measure was used to measure marital adjustment. This scale was prepared by Spanier with 32 items in 1976 for measuring compliance and marital adjustment. This

scale is used to assess the quality of the marital relationship in terms of the husband or wife or any two people who live together. Four dimensions of satisfaction, solidarity, agreement, and affection are measured. This scale is of prime importance with Cronbach's alpha of 0.96. Alpha-scale in Iran was reported by Cronbach's method of 0.81. The criterion validity of the Spaneir marital adjustment scale was confirmed by its ability to distinguish between married people with divorced, homosexual, heterosexual, and unmarried couples<sup>(20)</sup>.

The data were analyzed in SPSS software (version 19) using descriptive statistical data include percentage of frequency, mean and Standard Deviance (SD).

## Results

Descriptive indexes of research variables are presented in Table 1.

Mean and standard deviation and correlation coefficients of marital adjustment in tree groups of attachment styles is presented in Table 2.

**Table 1.** The frequency of respondents based on age

Age	Frequency	Percent	Consumption frequency
Less than 30	65	31.55	31.55
30-40	72	34.95	66.50
41-50	43	20.87	87.38
More than 50	26	12.62	100.00

P<0/001

**Table 2.** Mean and standard deviation and correlation coefficients of marital adjustment in three groups of attachment styles (N=206)

Group		Mean±SD	Marital adjustment	P-value
			Pearson's correlation coefficient	
Attachment styles	Secure	113.37±10.407	0.531	< 0.001
	Anxious	110.89±11.67	-0.376	
	Avoidant	107.31±5.90	-0.282	

Illustrates that there's a significant relationship between marital adjustment and attachment styles and it has a negative relationship with anxious and avoidant attachment styles.

In order to predict the degree of marital adjustment based on various attachment criteria, Based on the findings, the value of observed F is significant ( $F = 84.62$ ) and 52% of the variance is for marital adjustment and is defined by attachment variables ( $R^2 = 0.52$ ). The predictor

variable's regression coefficients show that attachment styles may define marital adjustment's variance significantly.

In Table 3, various attachment styles' impact factors (avoidant = -27.72; ambivalent = -15.5) by considering T statistic shows that this variable is capable of predicting the differences related to marital adjustment variable with 99% confidence interval.

**Table 3.** Impact of attachment styles on the regression equation

	B	Error deviation	Coefficient $\beta$	t	Meaningfulness level
Attachment styles	99.22	0.43	0/69	11.53	0.05
Secure	155.72	1.728		90.12	0.001
Avoidant	27.72	2.147	0.769	12.91	0.001
Ambivalent	-15.5	2.512	-0.367	-6.17	0.001

## Discussion

This study predicted marital adjustment base of attachment styles in married women.

Attachment has been identified as an important variable in human life and its relationships with different aspects of the quality of life have been thoroughly investigated. For example, sensitive and compassionate caregivers try to develop deep relationships with children and these relationships are both qualitatively and quantitatively beneficial. In early childhood, verbal communication between a child and his/her caretaker mostly occurs about emotional events and leads to the child's emotional awareness and the formation of underlying mechanisms such as Emotion Regulation. Through reinforcement and secure attachment between a child and his/her caretaker, the potential of ER will be activated in the child and ER skills can be applied in real life. The results of studies indicated less anxiety and higher regulation of negative emotions in people with secure attachment, emotional secrecy in people with ambivalent attachment and self-determination and obsessive self-reliance in negative emotions in people with avoidant attachment <sup>(9)</sup>.

The results showed that the unsecure attachment styles were predictors of marital adjustment and the anxious attachment style is stronger predictive than the avoidant attachment styles. This is consistent with findings of Fahimi's study where the anxious attachment style had the strongest predictive power for marital adjustment <sup>(5)</sup>. This finding highlights the importance of early relationships in establishing manners of communication in adulthood. In other words, the attachment style of an individual is formed in childhood and is predictive of his/her future relationships. One of the result in this research was significant negative correlation between anxious attachment style and marital satisfaction. This finding is consistent with research findings from Aminpour et al. <sup>(27)</sup>, Mohammadi et al. <sup>(3)</sup>, Banse <sup>(21)</sup>, Shiver and callouses <sup>(22)</sup>, and Lopez <sup>(23)</sup>. Anxious attachment refers to an individual's sense of fear from being abandoned by others. It is known that the less an individual's anxiety, the

greater his/her marital adjustment <sup>(8)</sup>. People with high levels of anxious attachment style are in doubt about their self-evaluation and afraid that their partners may abandon them. They have less positive views about themselves, and are skeptical of their value as a partner in romantic relationships. In other words, this attachment style is associated with self-activation patterns in different relations. That is, individuals with this style tend to present a weak communication pattern and are worried of being unloved or abandoned. People following this style have a positive evaluation of others and devote significant importance to approval by others. They tend to be worried that their partner may fail to like them or continue to live with them. These people tend to have a poor communication model and are worried that their partner may not like them or leave them. To explain this finding, it should further be added that people with anxious attachment style provoke excessive psychological trouble for their spouse, somehow limiting the freedom and autonomy of the spouse because of control and permanent adhesion they exert onto the spouse. It is because such people have anxiety and the sense of constant abandonment as well as intense interest and a constant sense of unfaithfulness on the part of the partner. Tolerance of the behavior and characteristics of the ambivalent spouse rises problems for the partner leading to cold relationship and marital dissatisfaction in the long run <sup>(3, 5, 19, 24)</sup>. In the present study, there was a significant negative correlation between avoidant attachment style and marital adjustment. This is consistent with the results of Lopez <sup>(23)</sup>, Ahmadi <sup>(25)</sup>, Khojasteh Mehr <sup>(24)</sup>, and Mohammadi's <sup>(3)</sup> studies. In the avoidant attachment style, the individual strictly avoids close and intimate relationships, and subconsciously dismisses the relationship as soon as s/he feels that the relationship is getting intimate. Given the fact that attachment styles are predictive of marital adjustment, one can propose educational projects for mothers across the country with regard to manners of appropriate interaction with children. Also, preventive and therapeutic measures should



be developed and applied in the context of attachment theory. Finally, it is better that during counseling sessions before marriage to assess the couples' attachment styles and evaluation of life to help the couple with correct choices of life partner and improve marital adjustment.

### Conclusion

The results of this study showed that the experiences of childhood and the type of relationship that each individual with his or her parent can affect the formation of attachment styles that influence interpersonal relationships in adulthood. Childhood violence affects the formation of insecure attachment behaviors in current relationships. In addition, attachment behaviors predicted the use of violence in marital relationships. Different attachment styles show that individuals should use different ways to therapy. accordingly, individuals with anxious attachment may be necessary to confront their fear loneliness while individuals with avoidant attachment might to learn how to connect emotionally with others.

Attachment styles affects the marital adjustment directly. These findings indicate that couples experienced violence in their family tend to show insecure attachment styles so experience more maladjustment in marital relationship.

The main interest of the researcher was to show the importance of early relationships in childhood that will have a great impact on relations with others, choosing a spouse and marital adjustment.

In the quadripartite model, wives with secure attachment who have positive approaches of self and others, typically have high self-esteem and so they can form good relation and maintain intimate relationships. Wives with avoidant attachment who experience lower anxiety and higher avoidance (positive model of self, negative model of others), usually keep up a positive self-image by defensively weakness the importance of their

attachment needs and keeping emotional distance from the partner. Individuals who have high degree in anxiety and low degree in avoidance (negative model of self, positive model of others) usually try to gain the partner's support and security to confirm their worthy sense of self. Individuals with the high degree in anxiety and avoidance (negative models of self and others), typically both desire and fear intimacy, based on their perception of being unworthy of love and trying to protect themselves from abandonment by withdrawing from the relationship<sup>(26)</sup>.

According to the results of this study, the preliminary developmental experiences of people in families play a fundamental role in the formation of attachment styles, intimate relationships and the way to cope with marital issues. These need further attention. Besides, counselors can build modification of attachment styles in matching spouses and solving matrimonial problems between couples.

Regarding the results of this study, it is suggested that premarital counseling be used to assess the attachment styles in both couples.

Its other application is marital conflicts and communication problems, and changes and corrections in attachment styles and treatment of anxiety and avoidance of insecure styles by cognitive and behavioral techniques.

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### Conflict of Interest

Authors declare no conflict of interests.

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