

## Comparative study of Aggression and Academic Adjustment based of Attachment styles

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present research is to investigate the amount of aggression and educational adjustment in different forms of attachments (secure, avoidance and anxious ambivalent). In this study, 231 students (202 girls and 29 boys) participated in the research from different majors of Azad University of Karaj. The subjects were asked to fill out the Buss-Perry aggression scale, Baker & Sirk academic adjustment questionnaire and Hazan and Shaver's adult attachment questionnaire. The results showed that the amount of total aggression and also subscales of physical aggression, hostility and anger was significantly lower in secure students compared to the insecure ones. But there was no difference between the verbal subscale among secure and insecure students. Also amount of academic adjustment among the subjects was significantly higher among the secure students compared to the insecure ones. We can conclude from other results of the study that there is a significant difference between aggression in ambivalent-anxious, secure, and avoidance groups, in a way that amount of aggression among the students having ambivalent attachment is higher compared to secure and avoidance attachment students. According to the findings of the present research we can conclude that we should consider interfering factors such as attachment to achieve educational adjustment and decrease aggression among the students.

**Key words:** attachment, aggression, academic adjustment

### INTRODUCTION

Aggressive behavior has become a routine part of human life which unfortunately seems normal. Such behaviors can be problematic in extended fields such as family, school, university, work place, etc. In order to define aggression, we should be able to understand the intention of the aggressive people, because when a behavior is considered aggressive, it is done for harming others. Such behaviors can be physical or mental. Aggression is a behavior having different biological, psychological and sociological reasons each of which specifying a vast area causing an appropriate ground for analysis and investigation. Different factors play roles in creating and aggravating the aggressive behavior which are investigated according to different viewpoints. Miller (1941, cited in Krahe, 2001) presenting the earlier

disappointment-aggression hypothesis, stated that aggression is created when activities to achieve a certain goal fails. The more important the target is, the disappointment resulting will be more strong.

Berkowitz (1969) implies the importance of negative emotions for aggressive behaviors among the human beings. Bandura (1997) considers experimental learning and empowering aggression as the factors creating and increasing aggression (Anderson and Bushman, 2001; Bushman and Anderson, 2002, cited in Baron, 2006).

Zilman (1979) considers two physiologic provocation, undesirable happenings, interpretation method for happenings and naming them. Also he implies to previous stimulations which can be transferred to the underway happenings.

Social-cognitive information process model also implies the deflection in social information processing in decoding the signs observed in different social situations, interpreting the situation of targeting, determining the approaches and evaluation which can decrease the effective compliment with daily social problems and increase the possibility of using an strategic solution for aggression (PakaSalahati, 2000 , cited by Izadi, 2009).

It seems that one of the effective factors in creating aggression is insecurity attachment style. Compbell, (2008), Earl (2009), and Casas (2006) showed that people having insecurity attachments report high levels of aggression.

It is believed that attachment quality has long term influences on different dimensions of Children's lives, because negative initial patterns and positive schemes coming from oneself and others which are formed in the context of emotional relations with parents, function as cognitive filters for the future experiments in stressful and risky situations (Munhollan and Bretherton, 1999, cited by Miner & Bonab 2009).

On the other hand, rage and aggression is in opposite relation with educational adjustment. According to Omotesto (2006), adjustment with university and learning how to live as a student comes with so many challenges such as being adjusted with a new culture. Karlo (1999) says that in such situation, one is in a vague and confusion, that is he doesn't know what to do, how to speak, how to state his needs, where to go and how to evaluate his behaviors. An adjusted student is one who does his homework well had has an acceptable academic progress. In addition, he should have an approving function in two non educational activities such as art and social activities, and regulates his activities according to his future job (Lubben et al, 2010).

Researches show that there are different emotional or psychological factors related to educational adjustment of students (Murray and Malmgren, 2005; Lent, Taveira and Singley, 2009; Shim and Finch, 2013; Zee, Kooman and Veendroin, 2013). For example, Lent et al (2009) showed in a longitudinal study on 252 Portuguese students that social support and self-efficiency in education, can predict educational adjustment and life satisfaction.

So, issues such as rage, anxious, depression, difference between students' parents and weak relation between students and parents can negatively affect opposing factors, such as social and personal adjustment, educational adjustment, mental health, and social support. Researchers believe that social support prepares people for stand against the problems and promotes positive and adjusted behaviors. Different studies have proved the positive role of social contacts on psychological adjustment. For example, Boulter (2002) investigated the relation between self-presupposition and educational adjustment among the first year American students. The results showed that the conception of the students of their own mental ability and the ability of making new friends can generally predict educational adjustment. The studies have proved that the initial attachment in childhood is the basis of future social relations with peers and adults which can be modified in teenage period or fixed. Also the findings showed that active participation in clear relation, responsibility and warm relation between teachers and students has an important role in determining the quality of the relations (Murray and Greeverg, 2001; Pianta and Steinberg, 1992, cited in Murray and Malmgren, 2005).

Casting a quick look on teenage period, we can see that the period is so much different from childhood's attachment styles. Nevertheless, physical contacts have lower necessity in this period but the patterns of attachment will remain as the most important and permanent aims of future years of life. So, independence and separation from parents and decreasing attachment behaviors are considered as a growing level for teens (Talebi and Varma, 2007).

So, according to the importance of attachment style in explaining most of behaviors specially aggression and educational adjustment, the purpose of the present research is to determine the amount of aggression and educational adjustment in different attachment styles in order to provide mental health in the level of the population under the investigation.

Accordingly, research questions are provided as below:

1. Is there any difference in amount of aggression between the students having secure and insecure attachment style?
2. Is there any difference in amount of aggression factors between the students having secure and insecure attachment style?
3. Is there any difference in educational adjustment between the students having secure and insecure attachment style?
4. Is there any difference in students' aggression according to attachment styles (secure, avoidance, ambivalence/anxious)?
5. Is there any educational adjustment between the students according to the attachment styles (secure, avoidance, ambivalence/anxious)?

## METHODOLOGY

After the call for participation of students in 12 departments of Karaj University, including technical and engineering, mechatronic, veterinary, religious, nursery, law and political science, sports, agriculture, literature and foreign languages, chemistry, psychology, management and accounting, 231 students (202 girls and 29 boys) from different majors of university voluntarily participated in the research. The questionnaires of adult attachment inventory (AAI), Buss-Perry aggression scale and Baker&Siryk educational adjustment questionnaire were administered.

18 students were omitted due to the similar marks in attachment styles extracted from statistical analyses and so the final sample group under the investigation decreased to 211 students (186 women and 25 men). The relative total average of participants was 23 years from 18 to 45 years and the standard deviation was 5.85, average of students' age was 23 in the domain of 18 to 45 and standard deviation of 5.68, male students' age average is 25 in the domain of 18-45 and the standard deviation of 6.89.

## INSTRUMENT

1: adults' attachment inventory (AAI): this scale is made using Hazan and Shaver (1987) attachment styles and is normalized subjecting the University of Tehran students (Besharat 2005). This is a 15 item examination and measures three styles of secure, avoidance and ambivalence attachment in the scale of Likert 5 degree (very low=1, low=2,

average=3, high=4, very high=5). The minimum and maximum mark of the subjects in examination scales are 5 and 25 respectively. Cronbach alpha coefficient in sub-scale questions of secure, avoidance, and ambivalent scales in a student sample (n=1480, 860 girls and 620 boys) was obtained for all the subjects respectively 0.85, 0.84, 0.85, for female students and for male students are 0.84, 0.85 and 0.86 which shows internal consistency in adults attachment inventory. To examine the test-retest reliability the correlation coefficient between the marks of a 300-member group was calculated in a 4-week time laps. Such coefficients on secure, avoidance and total of subjects are respectively 0.87, 0.83 and 0.84, for female students 0.86, 0.82, 0.85 and for male students are calculated respectively as 0.88, 0.83 and 0.83 which shows the acceptable test-retest reliability of the scale. In the present research, Cronbach alpha, with the omission of question one was 0.51. Content validity of AAI was investigated with the measurement of correlation between marks of 15 experts of psychology. The coefficient of Kendal for secure, avoidance and ambivalence attachment styles were calculated as 0.80, 0.61 and 0.57 respectively. The simultaneous validity of adults attachment inventory through the simultaneous implementation of scales "interpersonal problems and self-respect" of Cooper smith two cases of 300-member subject groups were analyzed. The results of Pearson coefficient showed that there is a significant positive correlation between self attachment scales and secure attachments from  $r=0.39$  to  $r=0.41$ . Between the marks of the subjects in insecure attachment style and sub-scales of interpersonal correlation problems from  $r=0.26$  to  $r=0.45$ . But these marks had no significant correlation between the subscales of self attachment. The results showed efficient validity of adult attachment inventory scale. The results of factor analysis also determined three factors of secure attachment style, avoidance attachment style and ambivalent attachment style and construct validity, confirmed the adult attachment inventory (Besharat, 2005).

2: Buss-Perry aggression scale: Arnold, H. Buss and Mark Perry developed the aggression scale first in 1992 which included 29 items which measured 4 dimensions of aggression (physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility) analyzing the sum of marks by four sub scales of aggression (Sanaei, 2008). The validity and reliability of the

questionnaire is acceptable. Cronbach alpha for the physical aggression, verbal aggression, rage and enmity is 0.85, 0.72, 0.83 and 0.77 respectively and also Cronbach alpha for the questionnaire is 0.886. In the present research also Cronbach alpha is equal to 0.886.

Also the correlation of sub scales in the questionnaire is different with each other and total scales between 0.25 and 0.45, which shows the acceptable validity of the instrument. Mohammadi (2006) also showed that the reliability of scale with the time laps of 5-weeks for the sub scales is between 0.61 to 0.74 and the retest coefficient for the sample group with 60 members was equal to 0.78.

3: academic adjustment questionnaire: in order to determine educational adjustment we used the subscale university adjustment of SACQ by Baker & Siryk which has 24 items (Baker & Siryk, 1989). The mark of subjects in this scale is between 24 and 168. The higher marks show more adjustments.

Psychometric features are investigated in different studies.

In Baker & Siryk, the coefficients of Cronbach for the sub scales of educational adjustment were higher than 0.80. In the study of Michaeili (2009) which was carried out on the students of Urmia University, the coefficient was equal to 0.84. in the present research the coefficient was equal to 0.841.

**RESEARCH FINDING**

In order to describe and analysis the amount of aggression in different attachment styles among the students and the standard deviation related to the attachment styles, table 1 shows aggression and its subscales.

According to table1, the highest average of attachment style is belonging to secure attachment style and the highest standard deviation is for ambivalent - anxious attachment style. Also in the aggression sub scales, the highest standard deviation in related to physical aggression.

*Table1. The mean, standard deviation, attachment styles and aggression scale and its subscales and also decision adjustments*

Variables		mean	Standard deviation
Attachment style	Secure	14/29	3/41
	Avoidance	12/57	3/28
	Ambivalence	14/07	3/95
Aggression	Total aggression	75/48	16/96
	Physical Aggression subscale	20/36	6/42
	Verbal aggression subscale	13/62	3/43
	Hostility subscale	20/83	5/56
Academic Adjustment		20/66	5/27

In order to examine the first research question using statistical independent t-test aggression was tested in two group s of students having secure and insecure attachment styles and according to the results mentioned in the table 2, the t value , -3.06

had a significant statistical difference in these groups. So we have  $p < 0.01$  meaning that the amount of aggression among the students have secure attachment lower than insecure attachment students.

Table2. The comparison of aggression between students according to the attachment styles (secure and insecure)

Group	No	Mean	SD	T	df	sig
Secure attachment	95	71/52	15/01	-3.06	209	0.002
Insecure attachment	116	78/57	17/86			

In order to examine the second question, in the mentioned results in table 3, shows that the t-test amount obtained 3.14 is significantly different in various groups ( $P < 0.01$ ). This means that the

amount of educational adjustment among the students is higher among the secure attachment compared to the insecure attachment styles.

Table3. Comparing academic adjustment in the students according to the attachment styles (secure and insecure)

Group	No	Mean	SD	T	df	sig
Secure attachment	94	111/57	16/20	3.14	207	0.002
Insecure attachment	115	103/68	44/19			

In order to examine the third question, according to the results of table 4, we can conclude that the mean of physical aggression for the students having insecure attachments is higher than the students having secure attachment style which is statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

But there is no significance difference between verbal aggression in secure and insecure students. Also amount of aggression among the students having insecure attachment is higher compared to the students having secure attachment which is statistically significant, ( $P < 0.01$ ).

Table4. Comparing aggression sub scales among the students according to secure and insecure attachment style

Aggression subscales	Attachment	No	Mean	SD	T	df	sig
Physical	Secure	95	13/19	97/5	-2/14	209	0/033
	Insecure	116	04/21	77/6			
Verbal	Secure	95	43/13	21/3	-0/72	209	0/470
	Insecure	116	76/13	45/3			
Anger	Secure	95	70/19	11/5	-2/79	209	0/006
	Insecure	116	83/21	81/5			
Hostility	Secure	95	25/19	61/4	-3/77	209	0/000
	Insecure	116	93/21	50/5			

In order to examine the questions 4 and 5, comparison of aggression and academic adjustment

is presented in table 5 according to the attachment style (secure, avoidance, ambivalence/anxious).

The amount of average calculated for aggression in the secure group is 71.52, in avoidance group is 75.89 and in ambivalence/anxious group 80.34 which shows a significant difference between the averages according to the F value (F=5.708). Also the amount of average calculated for academic

adjustment in the secure group is 111.57T in avoidance group as 103.43 and in ambivalent/anxious group is 103.85 which shows a significant difference between the averages according to the F value calculated (F=4.918).

Table5. Comparison of aggression and academic adjustment according to attachment styles (secure, anxious, ambivalence, avoidance)

	Change sources	Sum of squares	Df	Mean of squares	F	Sig
Aggression	Inside group	57331/912	208	634/275	708/5	0.004
	Outside group	3146/846	2	423/1573		
Academic adjustment	Inside group	3222/678	208	339/1611	4.918	0.008
	Outside group	67500/834	2	674/327		

According to the fact that the results of variance analysis show the difference between averages, we used Scheffe post-hoc to compare the averages in pairs.

As we can see the mean differences in table 6, there are no significant difference between the average amount of aggression among the students having secured and avoidance attachment styles. Also there is no significant difference between the average amount of aggression between students having avoidance and ambivalent attachment styles, but there is significant differences between

the aggression average of secure and ambivalent groups (P<0.01). In a way that the amount of aggression in ambivalent group is higher compared to the secure group. In relation to the educational attachment and also according to table 6, there is significant differences between students having secure, avoidance and ambivalence attachment styles in a way that educational differences are higher in secure students compared to the avoidance and ambivalence styles but there is no significant difference in adjustment amount among avoidance and ambivalence groups.

Table6. The results of Test-Tukey, Pair comparison of means of aggression and educational adjustment according to attachment style (secure, avoidance and ambivalence/ anxious)

	Variables		Difference of means	sd	sig
Aggression	Secure	Avoidance	36/4	98/2	344/0
		Ambivalent/anxious	81/8	61/2	004/0
Academic adjustment	Secure	Avoidance	13/8	25/3	046/0
		Ambivalent/anxious	71/7	44/3	933/0

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

According to the results, in the present research, the students having secured attachments have less

aggression compared to the students having insecure attachments. This findings, are consistent with the results of (Talebi and Verma, 2007; Dutton and White, 2012). The attachment styles are rooted from the relation between child and his caretaker. When the caretaker is unable to create safety feeling for the child, one of the internal reactions of the child is rage toward the caretaker. This rage can create a static characteristic in people which will emerge in one's behavior in future. Altin (2010) argues that avoidance and anxious patterns are influential in relations with higher frequency in positive emotions and lower in negative emotions.

Also the results of the present research show that the amount of educational adjustment among the students having secured attachment is higher than insecure ones. The results are consistent with those of Adams (2000), Williams and Kelly (2005), Buhl (2007), Kenny and Sirin (2009) which showed that parents' opposition and family support is related with educational function. On the other hand, students having weaker relations with parents and receive lower attention from their family, face a lot of educational and social problems in universities. Although the students seek independency and identity, but still consider their parents as the sources of power and if the parents don't express their expectations from their behaviors and functions, or be blamed by them, students might face contradictions (Agliaata, Renk, 2007).

The results of the third question showed that the amount of physical aggression and rage is different among secure and insecure attachment style students. That is students having insecure attachment style, have higher physical aggression, rage and enmity compared to secured attachment styles. The findings of Tara et al (2009) and Parfitt & Ayers (2012) confirm that insecure attachment to mothers creates rage, and aggressive behavior. People having insecure attachment, show more behavioral problems. Balby according to natural behaviorism attitude said that children's, teenagers' and adults' rage is provoked following a loss. According to Balby, the major part of aggressive responses is observed among children and teenagers, who not only have experienced repetitive separations but also have been exposed to be abandoned (Balby, 1987, 1986, 1973, cited in Mansour and Dadsetan, 1995).

The results of other studies show that there are differences between students' aggression according to attachment style (secure, avoidance and ambivalence). The amount of aggression in ambivalence attachment style is higher than two other styles of avoidance and secure styles. And also in educational adjustment, secure group shows higher adjustment compared to avoidance and ambivalence groups. According to Bartholomew and Horowitz(1991), secured attached, insecure attached and avoidance attached people have positive internal models of themselves while the internal models of insecure and ambivalent-anxious groups are negative. On the other hand people having avoidance attachment style, avoid creating close interaction with others due to negative expectations and presuppositions they have, but they maintain the high sense of self-value, on one hand with denying the importance of close relations and on the other hand with focusing on the importance of independency. So these people having secured and avoidance attachment styles to show lower aggression compared to ambivalence/anxious attachment styles, because, according to the fact that doubt, contradiction, consent, disparity are the characteristics of ambivalent-anxious people, they are severely exposed to struggle, contradiction, disparity and abnormal behavior in stressful situation and social relations and this will end in failure and negative self-evaluation in the relationships (Besharat et al , 2003) and will end in aggression.

Also the present study shows that there is difference between educational adjustment according to secure , avoidance and ambivalence attachment styles in a way that the amount of educational adjustment in students having secured attachment styles is higher than students having insecure attachment style (avoidance, ambivalent and anxious).

Buhl (2007) who has investigated the effects of parents-children relationship quality of students health condition, said that increasing mental health of students relies on the quality of parents-children relationship quality and affection. Also Kenny and Sirin (2009) and Williams and Kelly (2005) reported that the type of parents-children relationship can play an important role in educational adjustment among the students. So it seems that support and affection of family, sympathy and conversations, discussions about the

university and the related issues have an important effect on students' future success and educational adjustment.

Among the limitations of the present research we can imply the limitation of administering the tests in only one university which decreases the possibility of generalization of the results. Also filling the questionnaires by people can be along with remembering mistakes. The results of the present research, however, determines the important role of sympathy in aggression and educational adjustment and shows that parents-children relations in childhood and even in adolescence can be effective in decreasing the role of students in their aggression and consequently their educational adjustment.

So, in order to achieve an educational adjustment and also decreasing aggression among the students, so many interfering factors are effective which needs more investigations.

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