

Exploring the Relationship Between Maternal Attachment, Life Satisfaction, and Romantic Relationship Satisfaction in Emerging Adults of Kerala

Vaishakhi DV¹ and Swapna Ramachandran²

¹M.Sc. Psychology ²Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, University College, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.

ABSTRACT

Emerging adulthood, a developmental stage characterized by identity exploration, especially in romantic relationship, with significant parental involvement. This study examines the relationship between maternal attachment, life satisfaction and romantic - relationship satisfaction in emerging adults of Kerala. Using the Adult Scale of Parental Attachment – Short Form (ASAP), Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) and Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), samples were collected from 150 participants aged 18-29 by using purposive sampling. The study used statistical techniques like Spearman's Correlation, Mann-Whitney U test and Kruskal-Wallis test. The findings reveal a significant positive correlation between safe maternal attachment, life satisfaction, and romantic - relationship satisfaction as well as between parentified maternal attachment and romantic -relationship satisfaction. Additionally, gender differences were observed, with females reporting higher life satisfaction and romantic relationship satisfaction. The implications of these findings for future research and psychological interventions are explored.

Keywords: Maternal attachment, Life satisfaction, Romantic relationship satisfaction, Emerging adults.

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INTRODUCTION

Emerging adulthood, typically defined as the age range from 18 to 29, represents a unique developmental period where individuals explore various life domains, including career, identity, and romantic relationships (Arnett, 2000). Within this context, the role of parental attachment, particularly maternal attachment, continues to exert a profound influence on personal well-being and relationship outcomes (Bowlby, 1973). The psychoanalytic theory suggests that the kind of the relationship formed with the attachment figures or primary caregivers during early childhood serves as the foundation for close relationships later in life (Bowlby J, 1973).

Research shows that secure attachments are generally correlated positively with life satisfaction, whereas insecure attachments seen to have a negative association (Hinnen.et al., 2009; Kirchmann.et al., 2013; Molero.et al., 2017). Similar trends are observed for other well-being indicators closely linked to life satisfaction (Karreman and Vingerhoets, 2012; Keizer.et al., 2019; Sadava.et al., 2009). Secure attachment has been widely connected to numerous positive outcomes (Birnbaum.et al., 2006), including enhanced emotional regulation (Gambin.et al., 2021), improved peer as well as academic competence (Diener.et al., 2008), and way more

Corresponding Author- Dr Swapna Ramachandran, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India, Pin : 695034.

Email id- website.uc@gmail.com

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effective caregiving behaviors (Feeney, 1996; Feeney and Collins, 2001).

Previous studies examining the certain attachments of interest have primarily focused on either attachments to parents or to romantic partners, rarely both are considered simultaneously. Notable exceptions include research by Guarnieri.et al. (2015) & Furman.et al. (2002) whose studies have indicated that early maternal attachment may shape life satisfaction and romantic relationship satisfaction. However, the relationship between these two types of attachments—parental and romantic—in predicting adult life satisfaction remains an open question.

Table 1: Spearman correlation coefficient among Maternal Attachment and Life satisfaction

	Life satisfaction	Sig (2 – tailed)
Safe	.247**	.002
Dependent	.054	.509
Parentified	.150	.067
Fearful	-.092	.264
Distant	-.062	.453
Maternal attachment	.030	.711

**correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2 – tailed)

Understanding how maternal attachment influences romantic relationship satisfaction can lead to better interventions for individuals who struggle with romantic relationships. Therapists and counselors could use this knowledge to address underlying attachment issues, helping individuals build healthier and more fulfilling relationships. Finally, Life satisfaction and romantic relationship satisfaction are interrelated aspects of well-being. Studying their connection to maternal attachment provides a more holistic view of how early experiences shape adult life, helping researchers and practitioners develop more comprehensive approaches to improving mental health and relationship quality

METHOD

A purposive sample of 150 emerging adults, including 64 males and 86 females, was drawn from various educational and occupational backgrounds. Sampling method used was Purposive Sampling. This study utilized the Adult Scale of Parental Attachment – Short Form (ASPA-SF) to assess maternal attachment, Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) to measure Life Satisfaction, and the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) to evaluate romantic - relationship satisfaction. Data were analyzed using Spearman's correlation, Mann-Whitney U test, and Kruskal-Wallis test to examine the relationships between the variables and demographic differences.

RESULTS

Results of Spearman's Correlation Analysis presented in Table 1 indicates that there is a high significant relation between the sub- variable safe of maternal attachment and life satisfaction, $\rho = .247$, $p (.002) < 0.01$. Therefore the null hypothesis is accepted which implies that "There is no significant relationship between maternal attachment and life satisfaction among emerging adults" except for the sub-variable 'safe'.

Result of Spearman's Correlation test presented in table 2 indicates that there is significant relationship between sub-variable safe, $\rho = .180$, $p (.028) < 0.05$ as well as

parentified, $\rho = .174$, $p (.033) < 0.05$ of maternal attachment with romantic relationship satisfaction. Therefore the null hypothesis is accepted which implies that "There is no significant relationship between maternal attachment and romantic relationship satisfaction" except for the sub-variable 'parentified' and 'safe' of maternal attachment.

There is high positive relation between Life Satisfaction and Romantic Relationship Satisfaction, $r = .360$, $p (.000) > 0.01$. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected which implies that "There is high significant relationship between life satisfaction and romantic relationship among emerging adults".

Results of Mann-Whitney U test shown in Table 3 indicate that there is significant difference in life satisfaction with respect to gender (females), value = 0.007, $p < 0.01$. There is also a significant difference in romantic relationship satisfaction with respect to gender (females), value = 0.002, $p < 0.01$.

Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected which implies "There is significant difference between life satisfaction and romantic relationship satisfaction based on gender of emerging adults".

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that secure maternal attachment play a critical role of shaping both life satisfaction and romantic – relationship satisfaction in emerging adults. The hypothesis formed in the study is that there is no relationship between maternal attachment and life satisfaction among emerging adults. Table 1 shows that there is a high significant positive correlation with one of the sub-variable of maternal attachment which is safe and life satisfaction but not with total as well as other sub-variables of maternal attachment. Thus the null hypothesis was accepted. When safe maternal attachment is provided with comfort and security, the child may experience confidence in parent's availability and support. This insinuate that the flourish in safe maternal attachment brings on greater life satisfaction. To date, some studies have explored distinct roles of attachment to both the mother and the father in relation to overall life satisfaction during emerging adulthood. A research by Lucia Ponti and Martina Smorti (2018) revealed that attachments to both parents were directly and indirectly associated with the life satisfaction of emerging adults. Additionally, research has found that the attachment bond with the mother tends to be stronger than that with the father (Buist.et al., 2002 & Guarnieri.et al., 2010). These findings also align with earlier research that highlights a positive relationship between individual life satisfaction parental attachment and (Guarnieri & Tani, 2011; Ma & Huebner, 2008; Nickerson & Nagle, 2004). Thus in any case, the findings of this study align with previous research demonstrating that

Table 2: Spearman correlation coefficient among Maternal Attachment, Life Satisfaction and Romantic Relationship Satisfaction

	<i>Romantic relationship satisfaction</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
Safe	.180*	.028
Dependent	-.003	.966
Parentified	.174*	.033
Fearful	-.075	.360
Distant	-.098	.231
Maternal attachment	.045	.581
Life satisfaction	.360**	.000

**correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2 – tailed)

*correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2 – tailed)

secure attachment with parents is a significant predictor of greater life satisfaction (Bradford & Lyddon, 1993; Jiang, Huebner, & Hills, 2013). Within the theoretical framework of attachment theory, the results underscore the impact of attachment bonds with parent on the altogether well-being of the emerging adults. Specifically, this study conveys that a mother–child relationship marked by security, warmth and safety will foster a sense of personal well-being, contributing to higher life satisfaction. But the other sub-variables of maternal attachment which are dependent, parentified, fearful and distant does not have a significant relationship between

life satisfaction. If a positive relationship was present with any one of the variable, the results will not be congruent with other studies as well as opposes all the theoretical frameworks of attachment as these sub- variables negatively affect satisfaction with life.

Another hypothesis related to maternal attachment is that there is no relationship between maternal attachment and romantic – relationship satisfaction among emerging adults. Table 2 shows that there is significant positive relation between sub-variables safe as well as parentified of maternal attachment and romantic – relationship satisfaction. This implies that the increase in safe and parentified maternal attachment leads to increase in romantic relationship satisfaction. Parentified maternal attachment refers to a role-reversal in which the child feels responsible for fulfilling the emotional or practical need of parent. But to the contrary of the study, previous studies showed no significance with relationship satisfaction (Yadav & Singh, 2024; Hasson, 2022). This study suggests that parentified maternal attachment is positively associated with satisfaction in romantic relationships. This connection may arise because, during childhood, the individual might have felt a sense of importance and fulfillment from being helpful to the parent. These positive feelings could later translate into greater emotional satisfaction and positivity in their romantic – relationships with a partner. A positive relationship between secure maternal attachment and romantic

Table 3: Mann-Whitney U test based on Gender on Maternal Attachment, Life satisfaction and Romantic relationship

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean ranks</i>	<i>Sum of ranks</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
Safe	Female	86	80.11	6889.50	4435.500	1.516	.130
	Male	64	69.30	4435.50			
Dependent	Female	86	67.27	5785.00	5785.000	1.710	.153
	Male	64	86.56	5540.00			
Parentified	Female	86	78.31	6734.50	4590.500	.927	.354
	Male	64	71.73	4590.50			
Fearful	Female	86	71.85	6179.50	6179.500	1.198	.231
	Male	64	80.40	5145.50			
Distant	Female	86	76.02	6538.00	4787.000	.172	.863
	Male	64	74.80	4787.00			
Maternal attachment	Female	86	73.10	6287.00	6287.000	.784	.433
	Male	64	78.72	5038.00			
Life satisfaction	Female	86	83.67	7195.50	4129.500	2.675**	.007
	Male	64	64.52	4129.50			
Romantic relationship	Female	86	84.95	7306.00	4019.000	3.098**	.002
	Male	64	62.80	4019.00			

** Significant at 0.01 level (2 – tailed)

relationship satisfaction was also highlighted in a study by Silvia Guarnieri, Martina Smorti, & Franca Tani (2014). Their research demonstrated that romantic bond serves as a significant mediator that link between attachment to mother and life satisfaction. Notably, the findings revealed a complex relationship: maternal attachment was not directly associated with life satisfaction but influenced it entirely through romantic attachment. Thus the present study suggests that an individuals who feel valued and securely attached to their own mother are more likely to develop secure attachments with the romantic partner, leading to greater satisfaction in their romantic – relationships.

Results in table 2 also shows a significant positive relationship between life satisfaction and romantic – relationship satisfaction. It was hypothesized that there exist no significant relation between life satisfaction and romantic – relationship satisfaction in emerging adults. Thus the alternative hypothesis was accepted. It implies a proportional relationship, that is, as life satisfaction increases romantic relationship satisfaction also increases. Love is usually rated as one of the significant factors in life and satisfaction with one's love life is a strong predictor of overall life satisfaction (Emmons, Larsen, Levine, & Diener, 1983). Forrester (1980) also found similar results that having a love relationship was a significant predictor of life satisfaction, while Gordon (1975) identified love as the most important resource for happiness. A study by Alicia Facio and Santiago Resett (2013) revealed that satisfaction in the romantic – relationship domain was a stronger predictor of life satisfaction than satisfaction in work. Thus from this study, it can be inferred that the quality of romantic relationship and relationship satisfaction make a positive contribution to life satisfaction. The emerging adults who are satisfied in their life and living condition may have a satisfying romantic relationship and commitment with their partner.

The other hypothesis was formed to know if there is any significant difference between maternal attachment, life satisfaction and romantic relationship satisfaction with respect to the selected socio-demographic variable gender. The result from table 3 indicate a significant difference in life satisfaction and romantic relationship satisfaction based on gender. Thus the alternative hypothesis was accepted.

Life satisfaction shown significant difference based on gender. From table 3, it can be seen that females are having higher level of satisfaction with life than males. Similar findings were reported in a study by A. Butkovic et al. (2019), which indicated that gender was positively related to life satisfaction, with women showing higher levels of life satisfaction than men. A study by Daig et al. (2009) also indicated that women were more satisfied with their family life than men, which could be linked to the findings suggesting that women's

life satisfaction is positively influenced by perceived social support. However, research has generally found small difference in global satisfaction between the sexes (Andrews & Withey, 1976; Campbell et al., 1976; Goodstein, Zautra, & Goodhart, 1982; Gurin et al., 1960; Olsen, 1980; Palmore & Kivett, 1977; Sauer, 1977; Toseland & Rasch, 1979-1980). Despite this, studies have shown modest gender differences in life satisfaction across various countries (Meisenberg & Woodley, 2015). In regions such as Protestant Europe, Muslim countries, East Asia, and Africa, women reported higher satisfaction with life than men, while in areas like Catholic Europe, ex-communist countries, and Latin America, this trend was reversed. Additionally, studies have suggested that while males and females may have similar levels of general life satisfaction, gender differences are more apparent in specific life domains (Daig et al., 2009; Fugl-Meyer et al., 2002; Ng et al., 2009; van Praag & Ferrer-i-Carbonell, 2008). Research by Zweig (2015), using the Gallup World Poll results from 73 countries, found that women either reported higher life satisfaction than men or no significant gender difference. Based on the present study's results, it can be concluded that, among emerging adults, females report higher life satisfaction than males.

Table 3 also shown significant difference in romantic relationship satisfaction with respect to gender. It imply that females have high romantic relationship satisfaction than males. Many previous studies have shown no significant difference in romantic relationship satisfaction on the basis of gender (Eda, Çürükvelioğlu, 2012; Kumar. S. A and Mattanah. J. F, 2016 Beştav, 2007) investigated the relationship between romantic relationship satisfaction and various factors, including gender, attachment styles, irrational beliefs, love attitudes, and place of birth. The study found no significant differences in relationship satisfaction based on gender or place of birth. However, a more recent study by Ângela Leite et al. (2023) revealed that being female and being in a romantic relationship strengthened the connection between love life satisfaction and the capacity to love, making the relationship more meaningful. The present study also shown a similar results among emerging adults that women have more romantic relationship satisfaction than men.

CONCLUSION

After analysis of the results, the findings of the study convey that maternal attachment has a positive correlation with life satisfaction and romantic relationship satisfaction. There is also a positive correlation between life satisfaction and romantic relationship satisfaction. Hence focusing on a secure and safe maternal attachment may provide greater life satisfaction and romantic relationship satisfaction among emerging adults.

IMPLICATION

According to the present study, maternal attachment is positively related to life satisfaction and romantic relationship satisfaction especially in the sub variable safe. Nowadays many individuals in the emerging adulthood period have romantic relationship. Thus, providing knowledge about forming a secure and comfortable relationship with the mother or care giver plays an important role in giving greater romantic relationship satisfaction as well as satisfaction with life. Individuals' gender were also found to have influence in life satisfaction and romantic relationship satisfaction. Thus the study not only gives us knowledge regarding the relationship between the three variables (maternal attachment, life satisfaction and romantic relationship satisfaction) but also provide insight to understand how much it affects the personal and social aspects of the society.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Studies

The study only focused on the emerging adulthood individuals of age 18 to 29, so it is not applicable to all age groups. It was conducted only with 150 participants, which, while providing valuable insights, may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. The results obtained in this study cannot be generalized outside Kerala.

Further studies can be conducted on other populations other than emerging adults as well as in other geographical areas and communities. The study can be used to analyze married and unmarried couples to understand the relation of the variables separately in both samples. Other demographic variables can also be tested with respect to the particular variables such as profession, area of residence, etc.

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