



The Effect of Separation Anxiety on the Attachment Styles Affecting Workplace Performance in Adults

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Abstract: The present study aimed to exploratively examine the relationship between adult separation anxiety, attachment styles, and workplace performance in a sample of working adults. Using standardized self-report measures like ASA-27 for separation anxiety, AAQ for attachment styles, and the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) for workplace performance, the study sought to understand whether emotional and relational vulnerabilities have a measurable impact on job related functioning. The findings revealed that while a significant number of participants exhibited high levels of separation anxiety and predominantly anxious attachment styles, there was no statistically significant correlation between separation anxiety and attachment styles (avoidant and anxious). Furthermore, neither attachment styles nor separation anxiety were found to be significantly associated with workplace performance. These results suggest that while emotional distress may be present in individuals, it does not necessarily translate into diminished professional performance. The study contributes to the ongoing dialogue in occupational and clinical psychology by challenging assumptions about the direct impact of emotional vulnerabilities on work behaviour and highlights the need for more nuanced and contextual research in this area.

Keywords: *Separation Anxiety, Attachment Styles, Workplace Performance, Job Satisfaction, Occupational Psychology*

1. Introduction

Anxiety is a common experience that everyone encounters at some point in their lives. It is a natural response to stress and perceived danger, which can be helpful in some situations. However, when anxiety becomes chronic or severe, it can interfere with an individual's daily life and overall well-being. Separation anxiety is a normal developmental stage that most infants and young children experience when separated from their primary caregivers. It is a natural response to the fear of being away from familiar people, places, and objects. As children grow older and develop secure attachments, separation anxiety tends to decrease. However, in some cases, separation anxiety can persist into adulthood, leading to what is known as separation anxiety disorder. This disorder is characterized by excessive and unreasonable fear or distress when faced with separation from home or attachment figures. The fear of separation can be so severe that it interferes with an individual's daily life, leading to avoidance behaviors and social isolation. Attachment styles are believed to be established in early childhood and can influence the quality of relationships throughout an individual's life. There are four main attachment styles: secure, anxious-ambivalent, avoidant, and disorganized. Secure attachment is characterized by a sense of trust, safety, and comfort in relationships, while anxious-ambivalent attachment is marked by a preoccupation with relationships and a fear of abandonment. Avoidant attachment is characterized by a reluctance to rely on others and a desire for independence, while disorganized attachment is marked by conflicting thoughts and behaviour in relationships. Workplace performance refers to how effectively an individual carries out their job responsibilities and contributes to organisational objectives. Higher job satisfaction is often linked to better engagement, lower turnover, improved morale, and increased efficiency on the job. Emotional struggles may interfere with concentration, increase vulnerability to stress, and hinder the ability to build healthy workplace relationships, all of which can negatively affect performance. Adults dealing with separation anxiety may find it difficult to work independently or manage pressure, which can reduce their overall satisfaction and effectiveness at work. People with secure attachment tend to communicate well, handle responsibilities efficiently, and maintain stability in work relationships, which are traits that support strong performance. In this context, the impact of separation anxiety on the attachment styles of adults affecting workplace performance can be significant, as it can affect the way they perceive, interact, form relationships with others, and their ability to succeed or fail in an organisation.

2. Review of Literature

Separation anxiety is the experience of intense anxiety that occurs with the state or expectation of leaving the basic attachment figure. This concept, which is based on attachment theory, is actually an adaptive response that ensures the continuity of care by preventing the individual from moving away from the caregiver or attachment figure. Separation anxiety disorder (SAD) involves significant distress when one is unexpectedly separated from home or a close attachment figure. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), edition 4, limited the diagnosis of SAD to children and adolescents. However, in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, edition 5 (DSM-5), the diagnosis was extended to include adults first diagnosed with SAD in adulthood (Bowlby, 1960). Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) studies have found that hypofunction of the prefrontal cortex and anterior cingulate cortex is associated with emotional dysregulation and cognitive dysfunction in those with anxiety (Bassi et al., 2022). Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are commonly prescribed and are known to be successful at managing anxiety disorders; however, there are no medications with an FDA-labeled indication for SAD (Bowlby, 1960). Attachment theory has long acknowledged that the need to form and maintain close bonds is fundamental to humans throughout the course of life (Bassi et al., 2022). Bowlby defined these cognitive schemas as Internal Working Models (IWM), which are mental representations resulting from two components: (1) a model of significant others (e.g., parents, close friends, and/or romantic partners), characterized by the expectations and beliefs concerning the availability, dependability, responsiveness, supportiveness, proximity, and comfort of attachment figures; and (2) a model of oneself, which includes information about whether one is worthy of attention, care, and support; one's ability to get sufficient proximity / comfort; and one's worth as a relationship partner. Avoidant attachment describes the degree to which individuals are uncomfortable with closeness and emotional intimacy in relationships. On the contrary, anxious attachment concerns the degree to which individuals worry about being underappreciated or abandoned by their partners. People experiencing heightened anxious attachment are heavily invested in their relationships, and they yearn for closeness with their partners in order to feel more secure. Accordingly, people with anxious attachment are more prone to use emotion-focused and hyper-activating coping strategies when distressed, which sustain or escalate their worries and often keep their attachment systems chronically activated (Bowlby, 1960). "Emerging Adulthood" is defined as a

developmental period ranging approximately from 18 to 30 years of age and refers primarily to young adults who do not have children, do not live in their own home, or do not have sufficient income to become fully independent (Bassi et al., 2022). Securely attached individuals often exhibit higher self-esteem and emotional intelligence, contributing to better job performance. In contrast, those with anxious or avoidant attachment styles may experience challenges in professional settings. Little et al. (2011) examined how attachment styles affect extra role performance. Their study revealed that securely attached employees demonstrate higher vigor at work, leading to increased organizational citizenship behaviours and reduced workplace deviance. Conversely, insecure attachment styles were associated with lower vigor and higher instances of deviant behaviours. Vîrgă et al. (2019) investigated the mediating role of burnout between attachment styles and job performance. Although research on separation anxiety in the workplace is sparse, its conceptual overlap with anxious attachment suggests potential implications for employee well-being and performance.

2.1 Objectives

The present study is aimed at exploratively investigating how separation anxiety symptoms and adult separation anxiety can be associated with emerging adults' avoidant and anxious attachments and its effects on workplace performance.

In this regard, the main objectives of this paper are:

- Evaluating how attachment is associated with adult separation anxiety profiles based on the symptom levels observed in adult separation anxiety along with its association with workplace performance
- Investigating which attachment style (anxious vs. avoidant) is prevalent among working adults
- Finding a correlation between separation anxiety, attachment styles in adults and workplace performance, and being able to define the population based on the data drawn from the selected sample

3. Methodology

For conducting the research, 200 individuals participated and willingly shared their data on a google form that was interpreted to give a conclusive result. Along with that, research papers were collected from various online libraries like Google Scholar, Research-Gate and Science Direct. The research papers helped in getting better knowledge about the topic and

broadening the perspective regarding the impact of separation anxiety on the attachment styles of adults. The key words used to search for the papers were separation anxiety, attachment styles, avoidant attachment, anxious attachment, workplace performance, job satisfaction, separation anxiety and attachment styles in adults, separation anxiety and workplace performance, attachment styles and workplace performance, adult separation anxiety disorder, psychosocial milestones, adult attachment, anxious and avoidant, workplace performance in adults and its critical review of literature.

3.1 Hypothesis

HA1 – There will be a significant relationship between separation anxiety and anxious attachment style amongst adults.

HA2 – There will be a significant relationship between separation anxiety and avoidant attachment style amongst adults.

HA3 – There will be a significant relationship between anxious attachment style and workplace performance amongst adults.

HA4 – There will be a significant relationship between avoidant attachment style and workplace performance amongst adults.

HA5 – There will be a significant relationship between separation anxiety and workplace performance amongst adults

3.2 Participants

A total number of 200 participants' data was used in this research where 56 of them were female, making about 28% of the sample, 144 of them were male, which is about 72% of the sample. All the participants were taken from diverse backgrounds through random sampling technique and the age range was 18 - 45. Participants gave the word of confidence on assuring full candor of the data shared, and all were informed that this study is voluntary, and they were at liberty to exit at any point of time. There was no set time limit for the completion of the questionnaires.

Demographic Details

- Name
- Age
- Gender
- Educational qualification
- Occupation
- Work experience

- Relationship status
- Children

3.3 Description of the Tools

In order to measure the variables in the sample taken randomly, Adult Separation Anxiety Questionnaire (ASA-27), Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ) and Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) were used.

Adult Separation Anxiety Questionnaire (ASA-27)

The Adult Separation Anxiety – 27 (ASA-27) is a 27-item self-report inventory, which is designed to assess separation anxiety symptoms in adulthood. Items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale (from 0 “this has never happened” to 3 “this happens very often”). Scores across items are summed up to obtain a total score for ASA-27, which are considered in the current study. Higher scores indicate a greater severity of adult separation anxiety symptoms. In the present study, the ASA-27 shows a satisfactory internal consistency of $\alpha = 0.95$.

Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ)

The Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ) is a tool used to measure an individual's attachment style in relationships. The AAQ assesses an individual's attachment style based on the dimensions: anxiety, and avoidance. The questionnaire consists of 17 items, with each item being rated on a 7-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 - strongly disagree to 7 - strongly agree). The questionnaire is typically self-administered. The AAQ has been shown to have good validity and reliability in measuring attachment style in adult relationships. In the present study, the AAQ shows a satisfactory internal consistency of α ranges from 0.75 to 0.91.

Table 3.1

SL. NO.	ATTACHMENT STYLE	ITEMS
1.	Avoidance Scale	1,2,3,5,6,7,8,9
2.	Anxiety Scale	4,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17

Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS)

The Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) is a 36-item self-report instrument used to measure employees' attitudes about various aspects of their job. It assesses overall job satisfaction across nine facets: pay, promotion, supervision, fringe benefits, contingent rewards, operating conditions, coworkers, nature of work, and communication. Each item is rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from “disagree very much” to “agree very much.” Scores are summed to provide the overall job satisfaction score. In the present study, the JSS is used to assess participants' satisfaction with their job, as a component of workplace performance. The JSS

has internal consistency reliability coefficients typically ranging from $\alpha = 0.60$ to 0.91 across its subscales.

Table 3.2

SL. NO.	SUBSCALES	ITEMS
1.	Pay	1,10,19,28
2.	Promotion	2,11,20,33
3.	Supervision	3,12,21,30
4.	Benefits	4,13,22,29
5.	Contingent Rewards	5,14,23,32
6.	Operating Procedures	6,15,24,31
7.	Co-workers	7,16,25,34
8.	Nature of Work	8,17,27,35
9.	Communication	9,18,26,36

3.4 Procedure

The topic “the effect of separation anxiety on the attachment styles affecting workplace performance in adults” was chosen keeping in mind, how this study might contribute to raising an awareness about the importance of healthy attachment styles and thriving workplace performance. Next, appropriate scales were found to facilitate this research. Adult Separation Anxiety Questionnaire (ASA-27), Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ) and Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) were chosen. These scales have been used together in a lot of previous research before. This correlational study was conducted using a google form to collect data through an online survey. Participants were randomly recruited through online platforms and community groups. The survey included basic demographic details of the participants and their response to ASA-27, AAQ and JSS scales. The average time one took to complete the survey was 15 minutes. After the data collection was completed, the data was calculated manually and verified using Python programming language. Then the data was analyzed in order to reveal a significant correlation between the three variables. Research papers and articles were thoroughly read and reviewed to obtain appropriate literature in favour of the topic.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data was analyzed manually and verified using Python programming language. Descriptive statistics were calculated for demographic variables, and Pearson's correlation

coefficient was used to examine the relationship between separation anxiety, attachment styles and workplace performance in adults.

4. Results

Table 1

SCALE	MEAN	SD
ASA-27	32.17	14.03
AAQ (Overall)	70.07	12.06
AAQ (Avoidant)	32.19	6.42
AAQ (Anxious)	37.88	8.02
JSS	131.2	20.86

Table 2

Correlation Between Separation Anxiety and Anxious Attachment Style				
S. No.	Variable	N	R	Significance
1.	Separation Anxiety	200	-0.0097	0.899349 (P-Value) Not Significant at 0.01, 0.05 or 0.10 level
2.	Anxious Attachment Style			

Table 3

Correlation Between Separation Anxiety and Avoidant Attachment Style				
S. No.	Variable	N	R	Significance
1.	Separation Anxiety	200	-0.0243	0.735866 (P-Value) Not Significant at 0.01, 0.05 or 0.10 level
2.	Avoidant Attachment Style			

Table 4

Correlation Between Anxious Attachment Style and Workplace Performance				
S. No.	Variable	N	R	Significance
1.	Anxious Attachment Style	200	0.0553	0.436714 (P-Value) Not Significant at 0.01, 0.05 or 0.10 level
2.	Workplace Performance			

Table 5

Correlation Between Avoidant Attachment Style and Workplace Performance				
S. No.	Variable	N	R	Significance

1.	Avoidant Attachment Style	200	-0.0428	0.554851 (P-Value)
2.	Workplace Performance			Not Significant at 0.01, 0.05 or 0.10 level

Table 6

Correlation Between Separation Anxiety and Workplace Performance				
S. No.	Variable	N	R	Significance
1.	Separation Anxiety	200	0.1034	0.145105 (P-Value)
2.	Workplace Performance			Not Significant at 0.01, 0.05 or 0.10 level

Response was collected from a total of 200 participants. The age range was from 18 to 45 and the sample included 56 females (28% of the sample) and 144 males (72% of the sample). Majority of the participants showed signs of high separation anxiety, with the mean score of Adult Separation Anxiety Questionnaire to be 32.17 and the standard deviation score being 14.03, with the minimum value being 1 and the maximum value being 75. The mean score of Adult Attachment Questionnaire (overall) came to be 70.07 and the standard deviation score being 12.06, with the minimum value being 33 and maximum value being 100. The mean score of Adult Attachment Questionnaire (Avoidant) came to be 32.19 and the standard deviation score being 6.42, the mean score of Adult Attachment Questionnaire (Anxious) came to be 37.88 and the standard deviation score being 8.02. The mean score of Job Satisfaction Survey came to be 131.2 and the standard deviation score being 20.86. Correlational analysis revealed that there was no significant correlation between separation anxiety and avoidant attachment style in adults. P-Value of 0.735866 indicates that there is no significant correlation between the two variables when using Pearson's formula. In general, P-Value of less than 0.05 is considered statistically significant, which means that the probability of observing such a strong correlation by chance is less than 5%. Therefore, a P-value of 0.899349 indicates that there is no evidence to accept the alternate hypothesis of significant correlation and conclude that there is no significant correlation between separation anxiety and anxious attachment style in adults. Furthermore, no significant correlation was found between avoidant attachment style and workplace performance in adults. P-Value of 0.554851 suggests that there is no evidence to accept the alternate hypothesis of significant correlation. There is no statistically significant correlation between anxious attachment styles and workplace performance in adults with P-Value of 0.436714. No significant correlation was found between separation anxiety and workplace performance in adults. P-Value of 0.145105 suggests that there is statistically no significant correlation between the variables being tested. However, whether or not the

correlation is practically significant depends on the context of the data and the specific research question being investigated. It is also important to consider the effect size, sample size, and other factors that may affect the interpretation of statistical significance. In summary, the P-Values provided indicate no statistical significance, but further analysis and interpretation might be necessary to determine the practical significance of the correlation.

5. Discussion

The present study aimed at exploratively investigating how adult separation anxiety could be associated with adults' attachment styles and its effect on workplace performance. The results related to the first and second objectives of the present study pointed out that working adults showed a significantly higher anxious attachment rather than an avoidant attachment style. Since, no significant correlation was found between separation anxiety and avoidant attachment style or anxious attachment style, it can be indicated that even though there is high separation anxiety in majority of the participants along with more anxious attachment than avoidant attachment, it is not correlated with attachment styles in adults. The results showed that there is no correlation between avoidant attachment style or anxious attachment style, and workplace performance suggesting that even with high avoidant attachment and higher anxious attachment it is not related to the performance of an individual in their workplace. Furthermore, there was no statistically significant correlation found between separation anxiety and workplace performance in adults, suggesting that even with the majority, notably 149 out of 200 that is almost 75% of the participants having high separation anxiety, it was not related to their performance in their organisation or not correlated to their workplace performance. These findings challenge commonly held assumptions about the direct impact of attachment related traits and anxiety on professional functioning. While earlier literature has suggested that attachment insecurity and emotional distress, such as separation anxiety, may hinder job related outcomes, the lack of statistically significant correlations in the present study indicates that these psychological constructs may not manifest uniformly across workplace contexts. It is possible that adults develop compensatory coping mechanisms or professional boundaries that buffer the effects of personal emotional patterns within work environments. Moreover, the nature of workplace performance itself, potentially influenced more by skill based, structural, and motivational factors may limit the observable influence of internal emotional states like attachment anxiety or separation anxiety. External factors such as organisational culture, job demands, leadership styles, and peer support may play a more pivotal role in shaping employee performance than previously assumed, which may explain the

non-significant correlations found in the present study. It is also important to consider the potential influence of cultural norms around emotional expression and professional conduct, particularly in collectivistic societies like India, where personal distress may be masked in favour of meeting role expectations. This cultural element might account for the disconnection between high self-reported separation anxiety and maintained workplace performance. Another noteworthy aspect is the age and experience of the participants. Many adults may have already developed adaptive strategies to compartmentalize or manage attachment related concerns, thus minimizing their impact on job related tasks. The observed lack of correlation might also reflect the limitations of self-report measures, as individuals may not always be consciously aware of how deeper attachment processes affect their behaviours or may underreport difficulties in professional contexts. While the present study observed high levels of separation anxiety and a predominance of anxious attachment styles among working adults, these psychological patterns did not significantly relate to workplace performance. These findings suggest a complex interplay between personal emotional constructs and professional functioning, which may be mediated or moderated by various individual and organisational factors. Future research should consider longitudinal designs, qualitative approaches, and a broader range of workplace variables, including interpersonal conflict, burnout, and emotional labour, to more deeply understand the subtleties of how attachment and anxiety dynamics unfold in professional spaces.

5.1 Limitations of the Study

One of the key limitations of the present study is its reliance on self-report measures, which may be subject to social desirability bias and inaccurate self-assessment. Participants might have underreported or overestimated their levels of separation anxiety, attachment tendencies, or job satisfaction due to concerns about judgment or self-image. The cross-sectional design of the study restricts any causal interpretation of the relationships between separation anxiety, attachment styles, and workplace performance. Longitudinal research could provide deeper insight into how these variables interact and influence each other over time, especially as individuals transition through different stages of their careers and personal lives. Another limitation lies in the sample demographic. This limits the generalisability of the findings. Furthermore, the study did not account for potentially influential variables such as personality traits, coping mechanisms, mental health status, work environment, or organizational support systems, all of which could moderate the relationship between psychological factors and workplace performance. There are several limitations to consider

when conducting research on the effect of separation anxiety on the attachment styles affecting workplace performance in adults:

- Recall bias: Studies that rely on self-report measures may be limited by recall bias. Participants may have difficulty accurately recalling experiences of separation anxiety from their childhood, which could lead to inaccurate reporting and biased results.
- Sample selection bias: Studies that use convenience samples may not accurately represent the broader population. For example, individuals who seek treatment for separation anxiety disorder may differ in important ways from individuals who do not seek treatment.
- Correlational nature of studies: Most research in this area is correlational, which means that it is difficult to determine causality. It is possible that other factors not accounted for in the study may be influencing the relationship between separation anxiety and attachment styles.
- Generalisability: Studies that are conducted in one cultural context may not be generalizable to other cultures. For example, attachment styles may be influenced by cultural norms and practices, which could impact the relationship between separation anxiety and attachment styles.
- Social desirability bias: Participants may provide responses that are socially desirable rather than accurate, which could impact the validity of the results.
- Lack of longitudinal data: Longitudinal studies that follow participants from childhood to adulthood are needed to better understand the long-term impact of separation anxiety on attachment styles.

Overall, while research on the effect of separation anxiety on attachment styles affecting workplace performance in adults is important, it is essential to consider these limitations when interpreting the results.

5.2 Suggestions for Future Research

Suggestions for future research include incorporating mixed method approaches that combine quantitative measures with qualitative interviews to gain a more holistic understanding of how individuals perceive and manage emotional challenges at work. Moreover, expanding the sample to include diverse occupational sectors, geographical locations, and cultural backgrounds would enhance the external validity of the findings. Overall, further research in this area can have significant implications for improving the mental health and well-being of individuals who have experienced separation anxiety disorder and

promoting healthier attachment styles in adulthood along with improved knowledge and awareness regarding healthy workplace environments and behaviours.

6. Conclusion

The overall statement which was used in this study was focusing on the effect of separation anxiety on the attachment styles affecting workplace performance in adults. This research study can conclude on the basis of its findings that there is no correlation between separation anxiety and attachment styles (avoidant and anxious) in adults, no significant correlation between attachment styles (avoidant and anxious) and workplace performance in adults, and no statistically significant correlation between separation anxiety and workplace performance in adults. While existing psychological literature often emphasizes the negative impact of insecure attachment and emotional distress on professional outcomes, the findings suggest that individual emotional vulnerabilities, such as separation anxiety and insecure attachment styles, may not necessarily hinder an individual's ability to function effectively in the workplace. Ultimately, the study reinforces the importance of supporting employees' mental health not just for performance outcomes, but as a fundamental aspect of their overall well-being.

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