



## **The Impact of Emotionally Distressing Relationships on Persons' Self Esteem, Attachment and Mental Health**

<sup>1</sup>**Divya Sabharwal**, *Department of Psychology, Amity University, Punjab, Mohali, India*  
divyasabharwal5533@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup>**Richa Sharma**, *Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Amity University, Punjab, Mohali, India*  
rsharma1@pb.amity.edu

**Abstract:** Relationships involving emotional distress, especially emotional abuse, inconsistency, manipulation, and neglect, have become a topic of great importance in relation to psychological well-being, especially among adolescents and youth. This systematic review aims at investigating the effects of emotionally distressing relationships on identity development, attachment styles, and psychological wellbeing of individuals. Articles related to the topic were collected from relevant sources, namely, Google Scholar, PubMed, and PsycINFO, with the search range limited from 2000 to 2024. In total, about 25–30 articles which meet the necessary criteria have been chosen for analysis. Identity confusion, low self-respect, insecure attachments (both anxious and avoidant types), inability to regulate emotions, and vulnerability to developing mental problems such as anxiety, depression, and borderline personality have been found as the main topics discussed within the articles selected. Individuals experiencing emotionally stressful relationships demonstrate difficulties in maintaining their identity and forming adaptive interpersonal relations. Significant implications concerning the field of mental health and education have been drawn based on the findings obtained throughout the course of work. Special attention should be given.

**Keywords:** *Self-Esteem, Relationships, Attachment, Emotionally Distressing*

## 1. Introduction

In the recent past, the notion of relationships has assumed significance as far as mental health is concerned. Indeed, there is a lot of importance attached to interpersonal relations in ensuring one's emotional balance and self-concept. Good interpersonal relations usually involve trust, emotional support, communication, and respect, all of which enhance one's self-concept as well as mental functioning. However, it should be noted that some relationships are quite the opposite and involve emotional pain and discomfort for the participants.

Emotionally distressing relationships denote situations where an individual experiences negative emotions, confusion, insecurity, or emotional pain arising from their interaction with someone else. Not all such relationships will be physically abusive; rather, they tend to be psychologically harmful to those involved. This means that being ignored constantly by a partner, receiving mixed messages, or withdrawing emotionally might make the person feel rejected, worthless, and confused about him or herself and other people around. Emotionally traumatic relationships are defined as personal interactions that are characterized by consistent emotional torment, insecurity, disagreements, manipulation, neglect, or inconsistencies. Although these kinds of relationships do not necessarily feature any physical violence, they can be emotionally destructive. For instance, someone whose partner consistently ignores them, sends them conflicting messages, or withdraws emotionally might experience a sense of confusion, rejection, and unworthiness. The cumulative effect of such experiences could lead one to have altered perceptions about themselves and other people. Self-esteem is one of the key psychological constructs that is affected greatly by emotionally distressing relationships. Self-esteem can be described as an assessment of one's personal value. According to Rosenberg, the process of self-esteem formation occurs mostly as a result of interpersonal interaction and social feedback. In emotionally distressing relationships, people experience negative emotions and internalize them, thus feeling insecure, doubting, and believing that they are not worthy enough. For example, if a person gets accustomed to being told that she/he is "not good enough" in a romantic relationship, he/she will have low self-esteem. Another factor that is impacted by emotionally distressing relationships is the attachment pattern. Attachment theory was introduced by John Bowlby; according to his idea, attachment patterns formed in childhood affect a person's ability to form intimate connections throughout their entire life. There are three types of attachment style: secure, anxious, and avoidant. These attachment styles define the way an individual acts in close

relationships for instance, lack of consistent affection and/or fear of rejection can lead to an anxious type of attachment, whereby people become very dependent on their partners and afraid of rejection. Similarly, consistent hurt feelings or betrayal from one's partner can cause avoidant attachment, whereby people emotionally pull away to protect themselves from further harm. Apart from affecting a person's self-worth and attachment styles, emotionally harmful relationships can adversely affect one's mental wellbeing. Mental wellbeing is defined by emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing. This includes a variety of things such as how an individual thinks, acts, feels, and behaviors. People who go through emotionally stressful or traumatic experiences in their romantic relationships suffer from a range of mental illnesses such as anxiety, depression, stress, and emotional instability among others. To be more specific, someone who suffers from abuse or emotional neglect in their romantic relationships might end up thinking too much, worrying about being left alone, and feeling hopeless among other things. While the detrimental influence of relationships that evoke emotionally distressing experiences has increasingly been acknowledged in recent years, most of the research in this area focuses on self-esteem, attachment, and mental health issues independently. However, there is not enough integrated literature that would explore how these factors interconnect when it comes to emotionally distressful experiences. Such an investigation is especially important for the younger generation, since at this stage of personal development people start establishing their identity, developing emotional maturity, and forming interpersonal connections. Thus, the current study will be dedicated to analyzing the influence of emotionally distressful relationships on self-esteem, attachment, and mental health status of the individual. Exploring all these three factors from an interconnected perspective will enable one to achieve an exhaustive insight into the effects of negative relational experiences. This research can serve as a foundation for developing new intervention programs and counseling techniques. Among the most crucial psychological variables that are influenced by distressing relationships is self-esteem. Self-esteem is defined as a global estimate of one's worth. According to Rosenberg, self-esteem development mainly occurs because of interpersonal experiences and socialization. Individuals in emotionally distressing relationships develop self-doubts, low self-esteem, and feelings of inadequacy. For example, an individual who constantly feels "not good enough" in a particular relationship begins to believe it and consequently develops low self-esteem because of this negative perception.

Moreover, along with self-esteem and attachment theories, there are numerous other psychological variables that are affected by emotionally distressing relationships. Mental health can be regarded as an important psychological variable that determines our emotions, behaviors, thinking, and general psychological well-being. Thus, people's mental health can significantly deteriorate as a result of distressing relationships because they make us feel anxious, depressed, stressed, emotionally unstable, and even experience psychological trauma. For example, a person who suffers from emotional abuse from a romantic partner may constantly overthink his/her words, be afraid to lose this person, or suffer from sadness due to emotional deprivation.

### ***1.1 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework***

#### ***Emotionally Distressful Relationships***

An emotionally distressful relationship is defined as a form of interpersonal relationship that is accompanied by prolonged psychological discomfort, disharmony, inconsistency, neglect, and manipulation. Such relationships are not necessarily violent and can have a profound effect on an individual's psychological and emotional state. Those who participate in such relationships usually feel insecure, confused, emotionally drained, and dependent.

Many emotionally distressful relationships are typified by inadequate communication, poor emotional support, unpredictable behavior, and the fear of being rejected or abandoned. For instance, someone who receives confusing messages from their romantic partner or feels neglected may suffer from constant overthinking and emotional imbalances. In the long run, these experiences may affect one's perception of self and others, thereby predisposing them to psychological problems.

Therefore, emotionally distressful relationships serve as a major psychosocial stressor with negative implications for the overall well-being of individuals.

#### ***Self-Esteem***

Self-esteem can be defined as the perception that individuals have about their own value and ability. Self-esteem is vital in the determination of behavior, emotions, and interpersonal interactions. People with high self-esteem tend to be confident and resilient while those with low self-esteem are insecure and doubt themselves. Interpersonal relations have been found to be among the key determinants of self-esteem. In distressing inter-personal relations, people are likely to be exposed to critical remarks, neglect, and lack of acknowledgment. In this regard, people develop poor perceptions about themselves in relation to their partners. The common negative

perceptions include feeling not good enough and unworthy of love. Such negative perceptions about oneself become permanent over time, resulting in persistent low self-esteem.

### ***Attachment Theory***

Attachment theory was developed by John Bowlby and explains how relationship experiences at an early stage as well as later in life create emotional ties and determine how people relate to one another. According to this theory, people form internal models of relationships based on their experiences that help them predict outcomes in future relationships. Attachment styles can be distinguished into three major categories: secure, anxious, and avoidant. The characteristic feature of secure attachment style is trust and emotional safety, while the feature of anxious attachment is fear of being left alone and high dependency on others. Avoidant attachment style is represented by emotional coldness and aversion to intimacy. Distressing emotions and relationship experiences often contribute to the formation of certain attachment styles. For instance, unpredictable and inconsistent affection can lead to the development of anxious attachment when people tend to depend too much on others. At the same time, emotional pain and neglect can serve as the reasons for avoidant attachment. Therefore, attachment styles serve as a mediator between relationship experiences and responses to them.

### ***Mental Health***

Mental Health refers to a state of emotional, psychological, and social well-being in which individuals can cope with stress, function effectively, and maintain healthy relationships. It encompasses various aspects such as emotional regulation, cognitive functioning, and overall life satisfaction. Emotionally distressing relationships are strongly associated with poor mental health outcomes. Continuous exposure to relational stress can lead to increased levels of anxiety, depression, stress, and emotional instability. For example, individuals in toxic relationships may experience constant worry, overthinking, mood swings, and feelings of hopelessness. Furthermore, such relationships can impair an individual's ability to function effectively in daily life, affecting academic performance, social interactions, and overall quality of life. Therefore, mental health is a key outcome variable in understanding the impact of emotionally distressing relationships.

## **2. Review of Literature**

Recently, interpersonal relations have gained prominence in psychology studies because of their tremendous influence on the psychological well-being of people. Interpersonal relations

that are psychologically distressing because of their lack of stability, high levels of conflict, emotional neglect, and inconsistent behaviors have been linked with many psychological problems. This chapter offers a systematic literature review of emotionally distressing interpersonal relations and their effects on various psychological constructs such as self-esteem, attachment, and personality. This chapter will be structured thematically. It starts with an introduction to emotionally distressing interpersonal relations. Then, the relationship between emotionally distressing interpersonal relations and self-esteem, attachment, and personality will be discussed. In addition, this chapter will highlight any gaps found in the literature regarding the topic under investigation. There have been many researchers who have studied the link between interpersonal relationships and self-esteem. According to a research study conducted by Murray Holmes and Collins in 2006, people with turbulent relationships usually experience lower levels of self-esteem because of the constant fear of rejection and insecurities. Moreover, there is another study conducted by Ulrich Orth, Richard Robins, and Keith Widaman in 2012, which states that negative experiences in relationships negatively affect self-esteem. Attachment Theory is yet another theory used in examining emotionally distressed relationships. As described by John Bowlby in 1969, people's experiences during their earlier stages of life will affect their expectations and actions in future relationships. In this regard, individuals who have insecure or anxious attachment will be more likely to stay in a relationship due to their fear of being left alone and the need to be close to others. On the other hand, those with avoidant attachment will detach themselves from their partners when experiencing any type of relationship of distress. Additionally, Chris Fraley and Phillip Shaver, in 2000, reported that people with insecure attachment styles experience low relationship satisfaction and emotional distress. Emotionally distressing relationships and their effects on personality have been studied through psychological literature. According to Brent Roberts, Avshalom Caspi, and Terrie Moffitt (2002), there is a correlation between negative relationship experiences and high scores on neuroticism and emotional instability. Similarly, according to Franz Neyer and Judith Lenhart (2007), positive relationships foster adaptive personality traits, whereas emotionally distressing relationships cause maladaptive personality characteristics. Mental health constitutes yet another area where emotionally distressing relationships can have an adverse effect. It has been found through research that those individuals who are in emotionally distressing relationships suffer from anxiety, depression, and stress. In her book titled "Women Who Think Too Much," Susan Nolen-Hoeksema (2001) mentioned that long-

term emotional distress results in maladaptive coping mechanisms and depression. Emotionally distressing relationships may also create chronic stress.

The connection between attachment and self-esteem was also investigated by Jeffry Simpson (1990). He revealed that securely attached people tend to have higher self-esteem and greater relationship satisfaction, while anxiously attached individuals have low self-worth and high emotional dependence. Nancy Collins and Stephen Read (1990) also discovered that people with insecure attachments possess negative self-concept and are more vulnerable to stress in their relationships.

Regarding the impact of self-esteem on psychological well-being, June Price Tangney et al. (2004) revealed that people with low self-esteem suffer from depression, anxiety, and inadequate emotional regulation. This idea is also confirmed by Mark Leary and Roy Baumeister (2000). They introduced the sociometer theory that explains the correlation between self-esteem and psychological well-being. According to this theory, self-esteem is an indicator of social acceptance.

In addition to this, R. Chris Fraley and Phillip Shaver (2000) have also concluded that people who exhibit an insecure attachment style are more vulnerable to dysregulation and psychological problems such as anxiety and depression. It was noted by them that emotionally disturbing relations create unhealthy emotional responses.

A longitudinal study carried out by W. Steven Rholes et al. (2001) proved that people who suffer from disturbing relationships tend to witness deterioration in their self-esteem and general psychological condition. It means that disturbing relationships affect an individual's life on both immediate and long-term basis.

Also, a recent study conducted by Ulrich Orth and Richard Robins (2013) showed that a person with low self-esteem is more likely to be affected by depressive disorder in the future, whereas stressful events among others may lead to the fall of self-esteem levels.

John Bowlby (1980) pointed out that any disturbances within intimate relations would cause emotional distress, grief, and problems in establishing healthy relationships. According to his theory, relationship-related stressors have been identified as one of the biggest sources of psychological weakness.

Harry Harlow (1958) performed several experiments in which he found out that without emotional support and care, there was considerable emotional distress. Even though the

experiments were performed on animals, it provided the basis for emotional deprivation within human relationships.

Investigations conducted into romantic relationships, specifically by Caryl Rusbult in 1983, established the Investment Model, which postulates that people tend to stay in relationships despite the associated discomfort because of their past investments, lack of better options, and emotional dependency. Thus, the reason for the persistence of damaging emotional relationships is explained.

Moreover, research by Andrew Christensen and Neil Jacobson (2000) demonstrated that distressed couples who were in constant conflict and suffered from inadequate communication and emotional support were likely to suffer from increased levels of emotional exhaustion and psychological well-being.

Another piece of research investigating the effect of relationship conflict on psychological wellbeing has been done by Janice Kiecolt-Glaser and Ronald Glaser (2003). The researchers discovered that people having stressful relations experience a higher level of stress, which is evident in their raised cortisol levels and impaired immunity. Thus, emotionally challenging relationships influence the physical state of an individual besides his/her psychological condition.

Moreover, Laura Stafford (2011) claims that the problem with maintaining relations, absence of communication, and emotional neglect are significant predictors of dissatisfaction and emotional wellbeing.

More recently, research conducted by Monica Zilkha-Mano (2017) found that inconsistency in romantic relationships is related to increased emotional dependency and stress. People involved in such relationships face confusion and emotional turmoil, negatively affecting their psychological state.

Eli Finkel et al. (2014), on the other hand, discovered that while modern romantic relationships provide emotional satisfaction for people, they can also turn into a source of stress due to high expectations and unmet emotional needs.

According to studies done by Grace Larson and David Sbarra (2015), individuals who experience emotionally laden relationships and those who experience emotional distress during their relationships exhibit higher depression, intrusiveness, and emotional dysregulation while breaking up. Therefore, we can deduce that emotionally laden relationships not only affect individuals when they are in those relationships but even late

Moreover, the studies on psychological aggression in intimate relationships conducted by

Murray Straus (1979) showed that the emotional abuse such as criticizing, humiliating, and manipulating others can be highly responsible for psychological disturbances and low self-respect. The results are quite pertinent for understanding emotional disturbance in intimate relations.

The other studies highlighted the significance of accumulating effects of relational stress. According to Guy Bodenmann (2005), the continuous stress resulting from the interactions with a romantic partner plays a vital role in experiencing emotional exhaustion and dissatisfaction with life. In a similar vein, Frank Fincham (2003) showed that continuous relationship conflicts lead to depression and unhappiness.

In his study on coercive family processes, Gerald R. Patterson (1982) showed that constant conflict, criticism, and negative relations increase emotional disturbances and produce maladaptive behavior in individuals. As it is seen from this example, continuous negativity within relations affects the emotional life of an individual in the long term.

Also, John Gottman (1994) has carried out numerous observations of couples and discovered that such dysfunctional relations as criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling, also called "The Four Horsemen," are powerful indicators of problems within relations and emotional dissatisfaction.

Johnson (2004) has highlighted the significance of emotional detachment and unfulfilled attachment desires through her studies in EFT. She concluded that if an individual feels emotionally neglected and ignored, it will cause him to experience anxiety and insecurity.

There is additional support for this hypothesis from a study conducted by Amato (2000). He studied the influence of relationship conflict and discovered that people who experience high conflict or are engaged in distressed relationships are more likely to exhibit poor life satisfaction and psychological distress than those in harmonious relationships.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study employed a quantitative, correlational, and cross-sectional design that was used in this study for analyzing the effect of relationship experiences that lead to emotional disturbance on self-esteem, attachment and personality among the young adults. Standardized self-report questionnaires were filled up by the participants in an online mode to standardize the responses. A cross-sectional approach facilitated the collection of data in one go. Quantitative research

methodology was used for gathering numerical data by means of standardized self-report questionnaires. Correlational research design facilitated the identification of the relationship among variables, whereas cross-sectional research design facilitated the collection of data at one point of time.

### 3.2 Participants

100 young adults ranging from 18 to 25 years old formed the sample of this study. Sample was chosen using a purposive sampling approach. Participants having the specified age and agreeing to participate in the study were considered eligible while non-compliance and those out of the age range were not included in the study sample. Those participants who have undergone emotionally disturbing relationships participated in this research. . Those participants who failed to meet the criteria were not included in this research.

#### ***Inclusion Criteria***

- College going students (18-25 years).
- Able to understand the language.
- Self-reported emotional distress in a relationship.
- Gave informed consent.

#### ***Exclusive Criteria***

- The person undergoing psychological therapy.
- Diagnosed with severe psychiatric disorder.
- Cognitive impairment affecting responses.

## 4. Results

**Table 1.** *Descriptive Statistics of the Variables (N=114)*

| <b>Variable</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>Standard Deviation</b> |
|-----------------|-------------|---------------------------|
| Self Esteem     | 28.20       | 5.31                      |
| Secure          | 14.91       | 4.53                      |
| Anxious         | 17.24       | 4.52                      |
| Avoidant        | 28.30       | 5.68                      |
| Depression      | 24.03       | 9.68                      |
| Anxiety         | 25.43       | 9.83                      |
| Stress          | 25.94       | 9.50                      |

The descriptive statistics for Self Esteem, Attachment Styles, and Mental health are presented in the above table 1.

**Table 2.** *Correlation between Self Esteem, Attachment and Mental Health*

| Variables   | Depression | Anxiety  | Stress   |
|-------------|------------|----------|----------|
| Self Esteem | -0.4448*** | -0.392*  | -0.430** |
| Secure      | 0.365***   | 0.362*** | 0.299**  |
| Anxious     | 0.541***   | 0.507*** | 0.492*** |
| Avoidant    | 0.406***   | 0.419*** | 0.463**  |

Table for Correlation between Self Esteem, Attachment and Mental Health is presented in the above table 2.

**Table 3.** *Coefficient Table*

| Model    | Unstandardized<br>ß | Coefficient<br>Std. Error | Standardized<br>Coefficient ß | t      | Sig. |
|----------|---------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|--------|------|
| Constant | 26.423              | 12.167                    |                               | 2.172  | 0.37 |
| SE Total | -.729               | .296                      | -0.356                        | -2.464 | .019 |
| Secure   | -.043               | .409                      | -.017                         | -.105  | .917 |
| Anxious  | .972                | .452                      | .401                          | 2.150  | .039 |
| Avoidant | -.007               | .333                      | -.003                         | -.020  | .984 |

**Table 4.** *Regression analysis*

| Predictor    | Beta            | p-value |
|--------------|-----------------|---------|
| Self -Esteem | -0.356          | 0.019   |
| Anxious      | 0.401           | 0.039   |
| Secure       | Not Significant |         |
| Avoidant     | Not Significant |         |

## 5. Discussion (Sample)

This current research was designed to analyze the association between self-esteem, different attachment styles (secure, anxious, and avoidant), and the resultant effects on psychological well-being in terms of depression, anxiety, and stress. Insights derived from descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis will assist in understanding the dynamics among various psychological constructs in relation to their impact on emotional health.

### *Descriptive Results*

From the results generated through the use of descriptive statistics, participants in the current research displayed moderate self-esteem ( $M = 28.20$ ,  $SD = 5.31$ ) alongside moderate psychological distress, such as depression ( $M = 24.03$ ,  $SD = 9.86$ ), anxiety ( $M = 25.43$ ,  $SD = 9.83$ ), and stress ( $M = 25.94$ ,  $SD = 9.50$ ). Regarding attachment styles, the highest mean score was observed for avoidant attachment ( $M = 28.30$ ,  $SD = 5.68$ ), followed by anxious attachment ( $M = 17.24$ ,  $SD = 4.52$ ); however, the lowest mean scores were noted for secure attachment ( $M = 14.91$ ,  $SD = 4.53$ ). Thus, it can be seen that participants displayed more insecurity in terms of attachment styles, with avoidant attachment being the dominant pattern.

### *Correlation Among Study Constructs*

The correlation analysis has shown that there is a significant negative relationship between self-esteem and all measures of psychological distress. Self-esteem was negatively related to depression ( $r = -0.444$ ,  $p < .01$ ), anxiety ( $r = -0.392$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and stress ( $r = -0.430$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The obtained results indicate that people who have high self-esteem also have low levels of psychological distress, which corresponds to existing research on protective role of self-esteem against emotional distress.

As for the types of attachment, anxiety attachment has been demonstrated to correlate positively with depression ( $r = 0.541$ ,  $p < .001$ ), anxiety ( $r = 0.507$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and stress ( $r = 0.492$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Avoidant attachment, in its turn, was found to be related to all kinds of psychological distress positively (depression –  $r = 0.406$ ,  $p < .001$ ; anxiety –  $r = 0.419$ ,  $p < .001$ ; stress –  $r = 0.463$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Such findings show that there is a relationship between insecure attachments and higher levels of psychological distress in accordance with attachment theory.

Surprisingly, there was a positive correlation of secure attachment with psychological distress, but it was weak compared to that of insecure attachments. The results run contrary to the

predictions and theoretical considerations, according to which psychological well-being is usually associated with a person's secure attachment style. This could be caused by methodological errors or peculiarities of the sample, or even interdependence between the scales of attachment, which should be considered.

### ***Regression Analysis and Predictive Effects***

The multiple regression analysis has been carried out to determine the effect of self-esteem and attachment styles on the level of depression. The general model of prediction was significant and accounted for 34.2% of the variability in depression ( $R^2 = 0.342$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

In particular, self-esteem appeared to be a significant negative predictor of depression ( $\beta = -0.356$ ,  $p = .019$ ). It can be concluded that the lower level of self-esteem contributes to depression. On the other hand, the level of anxious attachment turned out to be positively related to depression ( $\beta = 0.401$ ,  $p = .039$ ). Secure and avoidant attachments were not predictors of depression in the obtained model.

The findings indicate that although attachment styles correlate with depression, anxiety and self-esteem become even more important when considering all factors together.

## **6. Conclusion**

This current study was carried out with an objective to investigate the effect of emotionally distressing relationships on self-esteem, attachment styles, and their mental health consequences such as depression, anxiety, and stress. The results of the research shed light on the interaction between interpersonal experience and intrapsychic processes in terms of influencing people's mental well-being. Self-esteem was shown to have a considerable protective function regarding mental health. Participants reporting high self-esteem levels had low scores for depression, anxiety, and stress. Hence, people's positive attitudes towards themselves may help deal with difficult situations and negative life events by acting as a protection factor.

Besides self-esteem, attachment styles turned out to be associated with mental health outcomes significantly. Specifically, anxious attachment was identified as a substantial risk factor for mental disorders, demonstrating significant associations with depression, anxiety, and stress as well as predicting depression in regression analysis. Anxious attachment involves being afraid of being abandoned by others, having difficulties with separating from a close one, and being overly sensitive in relations.

Avoidant attachment also had a positive relationship with symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress; yet it failed to predict depression as an independent variable. These findings indicate that avoidant attachment is linked with psychological problems; nonetheless, its impact on psychological well-being might be indirect or contingent upon other factors. People with an avoidant attachment style might try to control their emotional responses and keep physical distance from others to avoid feeling distressed. What is even more surprising, secure attachment was positively correlated with psychological distress. This finding conflicts with theoretical assumptions, which assume the presence of protection against psychological disorders in the case of a secure attachment style. Such deviation from theory might be due to sample-specific, situational, or methodological factors. Thus, further research needs to be conducted in order to confirm or refute this finding.

One of the surprising results obtained during the research was the relationship between secure attachment and psychological distress. This outcome contradicts the theoretical expectations since it is expected that secure attachment acts as a protector rather than as an independent variable. It is believed that this phenomenon might be associated with the characteristics of the sample used in the experiment or the influence of situational stress on the subjects. Thus, it is crucial to conduct further research. Results show that personal and interpersonal variables are essential for understanding mental health.

### **References**

- Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., & Wall, S. (1978). Patterns of attachment: A study of a strange situation. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Beck, A. T. (1967). Depression: Clinical, experimental, and theoretical aspects. Harper & Row.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Attachment. Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1982). Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Attachment (2nd ed.). Basic Books.
- Collins, N. L., & Read, S. J. (1990). Adult attachment, working models, and relationship quality in dating couples. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 58(4), 644–663.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.58.4.644>
- Hazan, C., & Shaver, P. R. (1987). Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52(3), 511–524.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.52.3.511>

- Lovibond, P. F., & Lovibond, S. H. (1995). The structure of negative emotional states: Comparison of the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS) with the Beck Depression and Anxiety Inventories. *Behavior Research and Therapy*, 33(3), 335–343. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0005-7967\(94\)00075-U](https://doi.org/10.1016/0005-7967(94)00075-U)
- Monroe, S. M., & Simons, A. D. (1991). Diathesis- stress theories in the context of life stress research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 110(3), 406–425. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.110.3.406>
- Orth, U., & Robins, R. W. (2013). Understanding the link between low self-esteem and depression. *Current Directions in Psychological Sc*

## **Appendices**

### **Informed Consent Form**

Impact of Emotionally Distressing Relationships on Self-Esteem, Attachment, and Mental Health

You are invited to participate in a research study that aims to examine the relationship between emotionally distressing relationships, self-esteem, attachment styles, and mental health (depression, anxiety, and stress). If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a set of questionnaires related to your experiences, thoughts, and feelings. The study will take approximately 10–15 minutes to complete. There are no known risks associated with participating in this study. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw at any time without any penalty. All information collected during this study will be kept strictly confidential. Your responses will be anonymous, and no personal identifying information will be recorded. If you have any questions regarding the study, you may contact the researcher. If you agree to participate in this study, please sign the following.