



A Study on Parental Attachment and Emerging Adulthood among College Students

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Abstract

The parent-child relationship in Indian culture is deeply rooted in traditions, values, and familial bonds, with family often being considered the cornerstone of society. Emerging adulthood, a developmental stage proposed by psychologist Jeffrey Arnett, typically spans from the late teens through the twenties. It is characterized by exploration, identity formation, instability, and self-focus as individuals transition from adolescence to full adulthood. This study aims to investigate the relationship between parental attachment and emerging adulthood among Indian college students aged 18 to 25 years. Standardized scales were administered to 50 college students to assess their attachment style with parents, including safe, dependent, parentified, fearful, and distant. Additionally, five dimensions of emerging adulthood were evaluated, namely: (a) age of feeling in-between, (b) period of identity exploration, (c) time of self-focus, (d) age of possibilities, and (e) age of instability. Preliminary findings indicate a significant correlation between parental attachment and emerging adulthood. These results underscore the importance of social and emotional support, particularly for individuals who have not felt safe in their parental relationships. Recommendations include lifestyle adjustments and the development of a strong social support system to navigate this transitional period, effectively.

Keywords: *Parental attachment, Emerging adulthood, college students*

Introduction

Attachment theory offers profound insights into the intricate dynamics shaping human relationships, particularly within the familial context. Central to this theory is the notion that early experiences of attachment with primary caregivers significantly influence individuals' socio-emotional development across their lifespan (Freud, 1920). Among the myriad transitions marking the journey from adolescence to adulthood, the phase of emerging adulthood emerges as a critical period characterized by exploration, identity formation, and increasing autonomy (Arnett, 2000). Within this framework, the parent-child attachment bond continues to exert a profound impact, shaping individuals' perceptions of self, others, and their place in the world (Bowlby, 1969).

According to Matsumoto (1999), in societies like India, where family plays a central role, individuals often find their life choices influenced by societal norms. Unlike many Western cultures, particularly those of the middle class, Asian cultures emphasize interconnectedness rather than individual independence. With an interdependent self-construal, Indians typically shape their actions in response to and in consideration of the expectations of others. South Asian culture is characterised as hierarchical, with limited scope for personal autonomy (Wider et al., 2016). According to a study conducted across 33 nations, India scored relatively high at 11 ($M = 6.5$) on the tight-loose culture scale, indicating a culture that imposes significant constraints, particularly restricting autonomy in various behaviours and social contexts (Gelfand et al., 2011). Moreover, with the rise of Generation Z (born approximately between the mid-1990s and early 2010s), characterized by their digital nativism and global connectedness, the dynamics of parent-child attachment are further nuanced (Twenge &

Campbell, 2018). The rapid economic and social transformations occurring in India are likely influencing how emerging adults prioritize and engage in tasks. Particularly within the urban and suburban middle-class segments of Indian society, there is an ongoing transition in the sociocultural landscape. Embedded in a postcolonial, euro-centric cultural milieu, Indian youth are navigating and reshaping notions of self and identity amidst this evolving context (Bhatia, 2017).

Over recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in nuclear family structures in India, resulting in shifts in family dynamics that afford greater scope for negotiation within parent-child relationships during decision-making processes (Bansal et al., 2014). Additionally, urbanization trends in India have spurred a significant migration of young individuals to major cities in pursuit of educational and employment opportunities (Mitra & Arnett, 2021). Seiter and Nelson (2011) suggested that as access to higher education and lucrative career prospects expands, emerging adults in India may increasingly experience levels of autonomy in decision-making akin to those observed in developed nations. Notably, while research on emerging adulthood has been extensively conducted in developed countries, its investigation in developing nations like India remains relatively underrepresented.

Parental Attachment

Attachment theory, as proposed by Bowlby (1969), provides a theoretical framework for understanding how early caregiver interactions shape individuals' internal working models of relationships. According to Bowlby, the quality of attachment formed with primary caregivers influences individuals' emotional and relational experiences throughout the lifespan. It emphasizes the importance of secure caregiver-child relationships in promoting healthy development and later well-being (Van Rosmalen & Van Der Horst, 2016). This theory posits

that responsive and nurturing caregiving fosters a positive sense of self and trust in others, while neglect or unavailability can lead to negative outcomes such as low self-worth and fear of abandonment (Wright & Perrone, 2010). Therefore, it is necessary to understand individuals' emotional health and behaviour across the lifespan.

Bowlby and Ainsworth's attachment theories, though served as foundational theories in psychology, initially focused on two primary factors: care and protection. However, recent research has expanded this theory, with Michael and Snow (2019) emphasizing a multidimensional approach. Rather than categorizing individuals into distinct groups, they introduced five dimensions of attachment, allowing for the possibility of high scores across multiple patterns. This perspective recognizes the complexity of the parent-child relationship, which encompasses various interacting dimensions. The Adult Scale of Parental Attachment – Short Form (ASPA-SF) was developed to efficiently assess these dimensions retrospectively, streamlining data collection. The dimensions identified were as follows: "Safe" pertaining to perceived warmth and safety, "Dependent" reflects the child's lack of autonomy in the parent's absence, "Parentified" denotes the child's sense of responsibility for parental needs, "Fearful" characterizes relationships where the child's need for support isn't met, and "Distant" describes relationships lacking parental support and attention (Michael & Snow, 2019).

Emerging Adulthood

According to various scholars, individuals in their late teens and early twenties are characterized as being in a transitional phase between adolescence and full adulthood, where aspects of both stages present (Macek et al., 2007). While psychosocial differences related to socioeconomic status and ethnicity exist among emerging adults, overarching terms and

general descriptions are still valuable for understanding this developmental period (Arnett, 2006).

Arnett(2001) suggests that emerging adulthood, as described by Erikson's psychosocial moratorium, is a period characterized by identity exploration. It's a phase where individuals feel caught between adolescence and full adulthood, with a sense of optimism about the various opportunities available to them, such as relationships, careers, and social causes. This exploration coincides with a growing sense of independence and responsibility, although complete autonomy is not yet achieved, as seen in the example of college students who experience a degree of freedom while still being financially supported by their parents (Arnett, 2007). This phase is also marked by a focus on self-development and the acquisition of skills necessary for adult life. However, alongside these positive aspects, emerging adulthood can also bring feelings of being overwhelmed due to the multitude of choices and uncertainties, leading to a sense of instability (Robbins & Wilner, 2001).

In the current study, the focus is on the Adult Scale of Parental Attachment (ASPA) to assess participants' perceptions of parental attachment, specifically examining dimensions such as Safe, Dependent, Parentified, Fearful, and Distant patterns of relating to both maternal and paternal figures. Furthermore, the Inventory of Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA) is used to explore the multifaceted nature of emerging adulthood, as conceptualized by Arnett (2000). The aim of the study is to deepen our understanding of how parental attachment patterns may be associated with individuals' experiences of emerging adulthood. Through an examination of the associations between ASPA dimensions and IDEA subscales, the research seeks to elucidate the interplay between early attachment experiences and the developmental tasks of emerging adulthood. The research contributes to the growing body of literature on attachment theory and emerging adulthood, especially in the Indian context which is

characterized with diversity and cultural differences, highlighting the enduring influence of early caregiver relationships on individuals' psychological well-being and relational functioning.

Methodology

Purpose

The purpose is to study parental attachment and emerging adulthood among college students.

Sample

A total sample of 64 college students in the age group 18-25 years was collected from New Delhi.

Measures

Adult Scale of Parental Attachment: Short Form (ASPA-SF)

The Adult Scale of Parental Attachment Short Form is a 40-item inventory designed to measure adult children's relationship with their parents (Michael & Snow, 2019). The items are rated on a Likert Scale from 1(never) to 5(constantly). The ASPA-SF includes a five-factor subscale that aims to measure attachment dimensions between both mother and father figures in childhood. The five factors include safe, dependent, parentified, fearful, and distant patterns of relating.

Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood

The Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood is a 31 item scale that measures the transition to adulthood and perceptions towards it among young adults (Reifman & Arnett, 2002). The items are rated on a Likert Scale from 1(Strongly disagree) to 4(Strongly

Agree). It has five factors including identity exploration, experimentation/possibilities, negativity/instability, self-focus and other-focus.

Open Ended Question

The question put forth on the google form before the participants to enquire about their experiences was “What does adulting feel like to you?”

Procedure

A Google Form survey was used to collect quantitative data consisting of responses to standardized scales, ensuring structured questions for numerical analysis. An open-ended question in the survey was administered to gather qualitative insights, allowing participants to provide detailed responses for qualitative analysis. The participants were assured of confidentiality and thanked for their participation.

Results

Table 1
N, Mean & Standard Deviation

	MSafe	MFearful	MDependent	MDistant	MParentified	FSafe	FFearful	FParentified	FDistant	FDependent	Identity Exploration	Experimentation/Possibilities	Negativity/Instability	Self Focused	Feeling In-between	Other Focused
N	63	63	63	63	63	63	63	63	62	63	63	63	63	63	63	63
Mean	12.7	8.92	11.2	10.1	14.1	9.52	8.27	12.0	9.44	10.6	23.8	17.1	20.6	20.6	9.98	8.11
Standard deviation	4.22	3.47	3.91	4.26	3.35	4.72	3.77	3.86	4.17	4.04	3.68	3.19	4.59	3.42	2.00	2.15

Table 2
Correlation Matrix

	MSafe	MFearful	MDependent	MDistant	MParentified	FSafe	FFearful	FParentified	FDistant	FDependent	Identity Exploration	Experimentation/Possibilities	Negativity/Instability	Self Focused	Feeling In-between	Other Focused
MSafe	—															
MFearful	0.28	—														
MDependent	0.596	* * *	0.461	* * *	—											
MDistant	-0.310	*	0.625	* * *	0.175	—										
MParentified	0.433	* * *	0.101	0.389	* * *	-0.025	—									

				Statistic		df		p	
MSafe		Student's t		1.230		61.0		0.223	
MFearful		Student's t		-1.743		61.0		0.086	

MDependent	Student's t	-0.494	61.0	0.623
MDistant	Student's t	-1.832 ^a	61.0	0.072
MParentified	Student's t	1.033	61.0	0.306
FSafe	Student's t	0.814 ^a	61.0	0.419
FFearful	Student's t	-1.216	61.0	0.229
FParentified	Student's t	0.232	61.0	0.818
FDistant	Student's t	-1.184	61.0	0.241
FDependent	Student's t	-1.518	61.0	0.134
Identity Exploration	Student's t	-1.363	61.0	0.178
Experimentation/Possibilities	Student's t	-1.175	61.0	0.245
Negativity/Instability	Student's t	-1.083	61.0	0.283
Self-Focused	Student's t	-0.597	61.0	0.552
Feeling In-between	Student's t	0.436	61.0	0.664
Other-Focused	Student's t	-0.623	61.0	0.536
<i>Note.</i> $H_0: \mu_{\text{Non-Attendee}} \neq \mu_{\text{Attendee}}$				

*Thematic Analysis: Emerging Adulthood among College Students
Exemplifying Quotes, Subthemes and Themes*

<i>Exemplifying Quotes</i>	<i>Sub themes</i>	<i>Theme</i>
<i>Full of optimism and confusion</i>	Confusion	Ambiguity and Stress
<i>Adulthood feels like a phase of confusion and uncertainty where you're learning about yourself, your identity, questioning your own beliefs and making a sense of who you really are. You're learning to be financially, physically, mentally independent. You get to "experience" life. It's like coming out of autopilot, it's not easy but somehow exciting. To me, it feels like I've been reborn and now I am learning how to be.</i>	Confusion	Ambiguity and Stress
<i>Being lost</i>	Emotional dysregulation	Ambiguity and Stress
<i>Responsibilities and stressful life</i>	Emotional dysregulation	Ambiguity and stress
<i>It is too much of anxious experience for me with a lot of confusions</i>	Emotional dysregulation	Ambiguity and stress
<i>It's hard to be an adult, people expect me to behave wise without being wiser than them, I am still learning many things, and sometimes overconfident and underconfident at times, the world never fails to surprise you nor the people. I wish I had more time, but whatever I would still wasted them in either overthinking or making scenarios in my head. I always think I was a different person back then, but the person now is the real me, if he is the real me, it's terrible.</i>	Emotional dysregulation	Ambiguity and stress
<i>Stressful yet liberating</i>	Exhausting but liberating	Ambiguity and Stress
<i>Cool but it's hard same time</i>	Exhausting but liberating	Ambiguity and Stress
<i>Adulthood is a fork, and I am a spoon. In quite literal ways, sometimes it's exciting and nothing feels better like example being able to earn enough to pamper your loved ones, some days it just feels too difficult to even get out of bed and there's mental exhaustion as well.</i>	Exhausting but liberation	Ambiguity and stress
<i>Adulthood to me brings lots of confusion, anxiety and stress. especially in college life we have a pressure constantly to perform best in academics and co-curricular activities too. we search for internships, get rejected, hustle and always think to place ourselves on the best position. we rent a flat, do chores, wash our clothes, cook and in between we roam in campus, post on social media then suddenly one day we regret of wasting our time. we study to pass our college exams and if we score passing marks, we regret again. we join coaching, travel for an hour, study there then an assignment/exam comes up and we miss our coaching classes and regret. i love to</i>	Hustle	Ambiguity and Stress

do music but I can not find a proper time slot in my schedule to practice it and then also i regret. we make relationships quickly, do hookups and all but after it also we regret only because everything kills time. It's been a rollercoaster honestly. I keep thinking everyday why I'm a part of insane routine and toxicity Adulthood feels like a pressure decisions are getting tougher expectations are getting bigger people are getting distant there is just a lot changing and after extremely overwhelming Clueless, no one thought us before how to deal with it. I feel adulthood for me would be being able to gracefully let go of things from the past that are not adding anything to my life. I feel as I am growing I am coming in contact with many new people, places and life situations, adulthood for me would be to keep changing with life without sticking to my past or having feelings because people from all the people from my past, be it the happy/funny friends I made in school, all of them they cannot walk with me hand in hand throughout my life, I will have to leave them behind with the memories in my heart and the understanding that time that is gone can never return. Be it, my siblings or my parents, nobody is with us throughout this journey of our lives, we lose people as we go, I think for me adulthood is being okay with losing people. Full of responsibility Workload Not able to share feelings That certain point people getting bored It sucks , it feels everyone is wearing masks ,nobody is real , they're all trying to impress each other or hurt each other and it's so much more complex than when you're a kid and you show what you are transparently , I still am transparent , and show what I am truly , which does make people find me weird but I honestly am over it , if I have to choose between being honest and myself and being hated or being someone I'm not just to fit into society , I'd choose the former without a doubt . Also so many people just start destroying their bodies saying oh I'm an adult , I drink I smoke I vape and I hookup a lot and what not and I just feel it's so stupid to be working against your body when you're supposed to be working on it . It is a machine , a resource , something that will be with you for eternity and seeing adults just ruin it is so sad Also groups and societies feel so stupid , they're just a bunch of idiots doing make believe , I see people in corporate meetings speak in English they don't understand themselves and staying behind in meetings after the client has left to ask what was talked about because they don't understand English , they just sat there being superficial .and nodding . So Many layers of dishonesty to oneself and to others , is painful . I don't like being an adult	Hustle	Ambiguity and Stress
	Loneliness	Ambiguity and Stress
	Loneliness	Ambiguity and Stress
	Loneliness	Ambiguity and Stress
	Loneliness	Ambiguity and Stress
	Loneliness	Ambiguity and stress

On most days, it's tough. It's challenging, overwhelming and really difficult. Adulthood makes it difficult to stay optimistic or to not lose hope. But there are (a few) days when it's freeing and fun. The days when I actually enjoy and look forward to the exhausting daily metro rides for some reason. The days when everything goes well in college. The days when I come back home and my mother is not tired or sick but in a good mood...

Adulthood can feel like a mix of excitement, responsibility, and sometimes overwhelm. It involves making decisions, taking care of yourself, managing finances, and navigating relationships—all while trying to find balance and fulfillment in life. It's a journey of growth and learning, with its ups and downs.

Adulthood feels like witnessing your parents age and wanting to support them. It's about having the freedom we craved as children, yet finding ourselves doing the things we were once forced to do, like sleeping early and waking up on time. It's an uncertain journey where hard work seems to be the only solution. Amidst the hustle, there's little time for friends or relationships, and the pressure to make something of ourselves looms large, as if this is our only shot at reaching somewhere meaningful.

Sometimes good, sometimes unnecessary

Little stressed but fun

Being able to cope up with my problems, insecurities myself is adulthood to me because this is the characteristic I feel, an adult should have. Definitely, there are times when you seek help, but on a general level depending upon someone too much is wrong. Adulthood to me is being able to have a stable emotional health. Also, knowing what is actually right (act or anything you come across daily) and if I tend to lack somewhere then I should be constantly working upon improving it instead of ignoring it.

Adulthood to me is to find out possible solutions to existing problems instead of just ignoring it which a large population tends to do when it comes to health, investments in maybe gaining knowledge or a better quality of life.

Pta nhi (I don't know). Please don't make me think hard

I haven't really thought about it much.

full of confusion being right or wrong, being judged by every small bit of action, full of optimism but sometimes feel pressured.

Adulthood for me was like a puzzle. I honestly feel a lot dependent on my parents, still in a protective bubble created by them, I don't feel like fully exploring my capabilities and interests to the fullest. Due to this dependency I feel the need to reciprocate the same for them pursuing career interests according to their needs. I want to provide a secure future for myself but only for them. It's a tussle between personal interests and responsibilities towards parents. I want to

Seeking balance

Ambiguity and stress

Seeking balance

Ambiguity and stress

Seeking balance

Ambiguity and stress

Seeking balance

Ambiguity and stress

Seeking balance

Ambiguity and stress

Seeking balance

Ambiguity and stress

Denial

Exploration amidst uncertainty

Denial

Exploration amidst uncertainty

Fear of failure

Exploration amidst uncertainty

Fear of failure

Exploration amidst uncertainty

become financial support to them rather than a dependent.
Moreover I feel disinterested in my peers, lacking emotional support and yet trying best not to upset others. This fear of judgement of others, rejection bothers alot when I think of following my decisions.

It is confusing most of times , leaving my beliefs and conditioning seems very hard .
Discovering myself , who I am and what I am seems like a never ending quest . The fear of failure , guilt of not doing enough . And the constant pressure to become something in life .
The need to get out of the house and not live on my parents money anymore and to be self sufficient and independent with no one to answer to but myself and my partner
Adulthood, for me, is being financially independent and fulfilling the responsibilities you have for the people you exchange love and care with. Along with that, feeling satisfied, happy and matured, while being proud of your life and experience you gain.

Being independent. Being free. Feeling responsible. Feeling the need to explore and just building a life that YOU have built from scratch.

Adulthood to me is about making smart choices for my future, being independent and self-sufficient, and being able to handle whatever life throws at me with grace and resilience
As I am still financially dependent on my family, I don't really feel totally like an adult. Like I am hanging in between and the only way to break free is to become independent, especially financially. Adulthood for me feels like taking responsibility and going after my goals in life, and I see innate positivity in that.

The moment we feel like we are adulthood is different for everyone. Some people start feeling like adults when they have to buy their own clothes, take care of themselves or make decisions themselves.

Others feel it when they go to university and have more freedom, like not needing to ask for permission to go out.
Freedom

To me, adulthood feels like exploring the life but with many problems like stress, anxiety attacks, medical emergencies, etc.
But I came out more stronger in every situation and I learned what I actually want in life be it in love, career and other things.

There's a sense of independence that comes with adulthood, but also a realization that you're now accountable for your actions and decisions. Your actions and decision will directly or indirectly effect your life in the future.

I also learn how to be optimistic and embrace the journey, with all its ups and downs because there is no destination the journey is the destination :)

Fear of failure	Exploration amidst uncertainty
Financial freedom	Exploration amidst uncertainty
Financial freedom	Exploration amidst uncertainty
Future planning	Exploration amidst uncertainty
Future planning	Exploration amidst uncertainty
Future planning	Exploration amidst uncertainty
Independence	Exploration amidst uncertainty
Independence	Exploration amidst uncertainty
Independence	Exploration amidst uncertainty

After coming to college, i have started liking adulting because i have freedom. I don't miss my parents and i like to do whatever i want. I do have limits of my own but i don't like to live with restrictions.

According to the norms set by society with which I agree adulting feels like being responsible, exploring taking risk and financial independence. But still not following same rules like settling down, stability and enjoying life. It's more of like finding your purpose, doing something that helps you achieve your personal goals as well as helps the society. And defining your own personal goals not that are already set by the world.

According to me it can be taking care of themselves, when they have to buy their own clothes, it can be when person feel independent and don't ask any permission to go out, It's feeling like a lot of burden over my shoulder, fear of losing love once, lost my smile and freeness

When you know the meaning of loosing things and you find what you kept for your future, is really something that u should've done before. Its just maturity for me

Adulting feels like a space filled with significant realisations, taking on responsibilities and concluding that it's not easy. It's a space where I've learnt to fall in love with the mundane tasks of life and appreciating slow days. It's about learning my responses and being tuned to my emotions.

Adulting to me is

1. Confusions about life, future, education.

2. over thinking

3. Need to get loved, get cared, to get heard, to get touched, etc

3. peer pressure to get a partner or to get into physical terms.

4. No clarity in the life .

5. Clubbing, Alcohol etc.

6. Just to disappear from daily routine .

7. Just want to explore new places.

8. Doesn't want to study anything and sit freely.

The list goes on...

The transition phase of life to come out from your comfort zones and achieve more.

Lying in the bed you made, and not having the option to play with others

More responsibilities and duties as a daughter towards your family always sacrificing ownself needs to make your family and friends satisfied.

Acc to me adulting means to be responsible for each and everything that happens because you are responsible for your stability be it emotional and financial and when you realise that you should be self sufficient and now you don't have to depend on someone for your needs but we

Independence

Exploration amidst uncertainty

Independence

Exploration amidst uncertainty

Independence

Exploration amidst uncertainty

Loss

Exploration amidst uncertainty

Loss

Exploration amidst uncertainty

Transition

Exploration amidst uncertainty

Transition

Exploration amidst uncertainty

Transition

Exploration amidst uncertainty

Caregiving

Responsibilities

Caregiving

Responsibility

Caregiving

Responsibility

ourselves have to be strong enough to fulfill our needs and also for your loved ones...as now you've to take care of your parents also . So adulting is self realisation of being self sufficient. Adulting is responsibility for me. We have to take care of yourself as well as your family. It's our responsibility to provide a better life for them. Adulting is the period for improving and showcasing our qualities , we have to consistently work on it to become a better person.

It's taking care of the responsibilities but keeping that inner child

For me, Adulting feels like or means taking responsibility of several things like career, parents, planning for future, etc.Should be capable enough of making life decisions with every aspect in mind keeping all the good and bad in mind. Having a clear vision of life and career, so that if someone younger than you needs guidance or knowledge regarding anything I should be able to provide in best possible way so that he/she can make decisions freely, not get confused.

take correct decision, responsibility, controlling emotions

Adulting feels like being more responsible, having a source of income to support myself and taking my own independent decisions. Adulting would be being less of a burden over my family and be capable to take their responsibilities over myself. Being able to take tough decisions and building a life for my own future.

Adulting feels like lot of responsibility for most thing to do something in life is the biggest pressure that u can take stand for ur own life .

Mixed feeling , lot of stress and pressure put on the mind either due to career or in general

Its comes with lots of responsibilities and pressures

Adulting feels like a baggage of responsibilities. A responsibility to be fulfilled more for others, not for yourself. More or less a demand with no choice. Constant surveillance is there in the form of people who keep questioning your life decisions and orientations. It also seems like living your best moments at one time and losing yourself in the vastness of the universe at another second. Adulting also stirs up unacknowledged emotions in you, exposing you to an array of emotions, you've never felt before. Both sides of your existence rebel against each other, seeking validation from external sources, making you feel distant from yourself.

Adulting I feel is a age were you learn many things we start looking at things different views were you see people struggling for jobs it's like we start taking responsibility of many things we learn to manage things.

Being more responsible and eventually learning the things slowly and reach to the adulthood more maturely.

Adulting is taking responsibilities, learning how this world works in a more realistic way, being more aware about myself and my surroundings, having career goals, learning skills and traits that will be useful for survival, trying to understand my parents point of view and differentiating between reality and delusion.

Caregiving	Responsibility
Caregiving	Responsibility
Decision-making	Responsibility
Decision-making	Responsibility
Decision-making	Responsibility
Decision-making	Responsibility
Decision-making	Responsibility
Expectations	Responsibility
Expectations	Responsibility
Expectations	Responsibility
Life lessons	Responsibility
Life lessons	Responsibility
Life lessons	Responsibility

<i>To be more responsible and mature</i>	Maturity	Responsibility
<i>To be mature enough as a single child of your family so that we can take responsibility of our family.</i>	Maturity	Responsibility
<i>Not really adulting because my family doesn't treat me like one.</i>	Restrictions	Responsibility
<i>At this point of life it feels like just getting the tag of being an adult but not getting the benefit of being an adult as family/people do not really let you decide things for yourself. it's always we know better situation as they are the real adults . So at this point being an adult is just a tag which along with itself brings to us the load of responsibility but not really any freedom of thought for any smallest of the things</i>	Restrictions	Responsibility

Discussion

The study aimed to analyse the impact of parental attachment style on emerging adulthood among college students aged 18-24 years. The sample size taken for this study was 63 college students using the convenience sampling method. Significant correlations were found between parental attachment styles and various aspects of emerging adulthood.

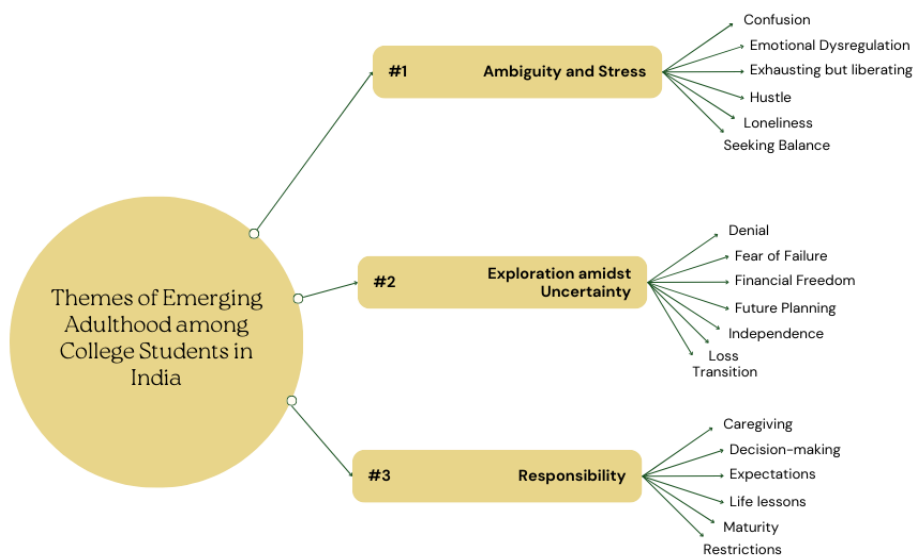


Figure 1. *Themes of Emerging Adulthood among college students in India*

Theme 1: Ambiguity and Stress

Participants reported feelings of ambiguity and stress and confusion, Emotional Dysregulation, simultaneous feelings of exhaustion and liberation, hustle, loneliness and seeking balance were the subthemes found under this theme.

A participant's need to seek balance during this transitional period is reflected in the following description about how they feel towards adulting.

“Adulthood can feel like a mix of excitement, responsibility, and sometimes overwhelm. It involves making decisions, taking care of yourself, managing finances, and navigating relationships—all while trying to find balance and fulfillment in life. It’s a journey of growth and learning, with its ups and downs.”

Theme 2: Exploration Amidst Uncertainty

They found this time to be a time of exploration while also dealing with a lot of uncertainty.

This is evident in a participant’s thoughts on what they think of this transition.

“Adulthood to me is

- 1. Confusions about life, future, education.*
- 2. over thinking*
- 3. Need to get loved, get cared, to get heard, to get touched, etc*
- 3. peer pressure to get a partner or to get into physical terms.*
- 4. No clarity in the life*
- 5. Clubbing, Alcohol etc.*
- 6. Just to disappear from daily routine .*
- 7. Just want to explore new places.*
- 8. Doesn't want to study anything and sit freely.*

The list goes on... “

This theme comprises of denial, fear of failure, financial freedom, future planning, independence, loss and transition as subthemes.

Theme 3: Responsibility

The theme of responsibility was prevalent in most responses from the participants and consisted of caregiving, decision-making, expectations, life lessons, maturity and restrictions.

A participant shared about the burden of expectations that he is carrying as an emerging adult.

“Adulthood feels like a baggage of responsibilities. A responsibility to be fulfilled more for others, not for yourself. More or less a demand with no choice. Constant surveillance is there in the form of people who keep questioning your life decisions and orientations. It also seems like living your best moments at one time and losing yourself in the vastness of the universe at another second. Adulthood also stirs up unacknowledged emotions in you, exposing you to an array of emotions, you've never felt before. Both sides of your existence rebel against each other, seeking validation from external sources, making you feel distant from yourself.”

Results indicated that individuals with dependent attachment styles tended to seek comfort and security from their caregivers, aligning with attachment theory. Conversely, those with distant attachment styles struggled to form close emotional bonds with caregivers, leading to feelings of fearfulness (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). Additionally, parentified individuals, who took on caregiving roles early in life, exhibited positive correlations with feelings of safety and dependence towards their mothers.

Furthermore, the study revealed intergenerational transmission of attachment patterns within families, with paternal attachment styles positively correlating with maternal attachment styles. Additionally, complex relationships were observed between parental attachment patterns and their implications for familial relationships and individual development (Brenning et al., 2011). The finding suggests that individuals may replicate attachment dynamics experienced with one parent in their relationships with other caregivers (Sroufe et al., 2005).

Attachment styles were found to influence various aspects of emerging adulthood. Being ‘Self focused’ was positively correlated with having a ‘Safe and secure’ relationship

with the maternal figure and 'Other focused' was positively correlated with attachments that were 'Safe' or 'dependent' with the maternal figure and 'parentified' with the paternal figure. Establishing secure attachment during emerging adulthood is vital as it furnishes individuals with a feeling of safety, which in turn facilitates their freedom to actively participate in the wider world (Schnyders, 2012).

The three themes identified in our analysis reflect the commonalities in the subjective experiences of emerging adulthood among the participants. India is a diverse nation and though there may be differences in their culture and family values, they still share similar views towards this transitional period.

Ambiguity and Stress

With regards to ambiguity and stress, the subthemes include "confusion", "emotional dysregulation", "exhausting but liberating", "hustle", "loneliness" and "search for balance". The analysis revealed that most people felt confused but also optimistic about the different milestones in life. They found it challenging to balance their emotions or develop proper coping strategies to deal with familial or societal expectations to fulfil their responsibilities. While trying to keep up with the hustle culture and need for balance, they found themselves lonely and unable to find people who were trustworthy enough. As individuals transition from adolescence to emerging adulthood, they experience a newfound sense of liberation, leading to a reduced reliance on both internal and external sources of guidance, ultimately culminating in a feeling of being "at home as an adult in the world" (Blaine and Farnsworth, 1991). The process of identity formation in young adults exposes them to vulnerability as they explore their aspirations and experiment with new roles, careers, and relationships. Like any demographic, young adults encounter a spectrum of challenges ranging from mild to severe.

Some difficulties arise from temporary situational adjustments influenced by environmental factors, while others stem from developmental hurdles that may initially appear fleeting but could signify deeper underlying conflicts (Escoll, 1987). The transitional phase of young adulthood is fraught with significant stressors, including unresolved adolescent issues, persisting conflicts, or past disharmonies that continue to shape their trajectory. Both internal and external pressures, such as the expectation to excel in education, profession, and relationships, alongside socioeconomic circumstances, contribute to these stresses. Consequently, the developmental journey of young adults is susceptible to derailment through various pathways (Kuwabara et al., 2007).

Exploration amidst Uncertainty

Though leading to a lot of uncertainty, this stage required the people to explore different aspects of life. The subthemes include “denial”, “fear of failure”, “financial freedom”, “independence”, “loss” and “transition”. Some participants felt like maybe they were not yet ready to accept this stage of life, while there were others who fully accepted it along with its challenges and the fear of not being or doing enough to meet the demands. Though it gave them an opportunity to discover their journey and capabilities, they often found themselves under constant pressure. This stage is marked by new realisations, satisfaction due to financial freedom, thoughts about future and getting out of one’s comfort zone. According to psychoanalytic perspectives, the emergence of a more independent self-concept begins during adolescence and becomes more firmly established in young adulthood, marking the development of a "preliminary adult identity" (Hauser and Greene, 1991). This process, often referred to as subjectivation in French discourse (Cahn, 1998), encapsulates the subjective sense of self or identity, allowing young adults to navigate between their internal and external realities (Rose & Bond, 2008).

Responsibilities

A central concern seen in the data involved the participants' sense of responsibilities towards themselves and others. Many focused on self-care while for some it was more about being caregivers of other family members. Many felt that they were expected to live and work for others than for themselves which shows independency and caregiving. This stage brought more agency in terms of decision making but there were some who felt constraints from their homes. Some enjoyed the experiences of learning and unlearning while being understanding towards ideological differences and found themselves moving towards more maturity. Haan (1981) suggests that during this developmental phase, young adults acquire traits conducive to navigating the adult world, such as reliability and consistency, as they assimilate societal values and norms into their lives and careers. This process contrasts with the spontaneity and unpredictability of adolescence. Striking a balance between conformity to community standards and personal values becomes a challenging journey for individuals.

Emerging as an Adult in India

India exhibits a unique blend of individualism and collectivism (Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). While some studies suggest a dualistic nature in Indian cultural beliefs, with elements of both individualism and collectivism, others lean towards a predominantly collectivist perspective (Sinha & Sinha, 2014). This study aims to address this unresolved dualism and its impact on emerging adults' life choices in India. Despite the prevalence of emerging adulthood globally, research on this demographic remains scant in developing nations like India, where the youth population is burgeoning. Therefore, this study focuses on the educated urban and suburban middle class in India, which represents a significant demographic undergoing pivotal sociocultural changes with implications both locally and globally.

Conclusion

This study explores the lived experience of Indian college students during the period of emerging adulthood and the relationship that it has with parental attachment. Based on the findings of the quantitative data, it was found that the parental attachments does have a significant impact on emerging adulthood. Ambiguity and stress, exploration amidst uncertainty and responsibilities are the themes found through the collected qualitative data. The results suggest that more emphasis need to be laid on the resources and emotional and mental health support that is made available to college students, especially those who have not shared a secure relationship with their parents.

It is recommended to help emerging adults make adjustments in their lifestyles that allows them to develop healthier coping strategies to deal with the new challenges and struggles, coming their way. They should be provided with better access to support services and care facilities to navigate this transition in life. India is a diverse land, so it is recommended to conduct more research on people from different socio-economic status, castes, religion, geographical location and gender to understand how these factors would impact the Indian psyche in this transitional stage.

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