



A Study on Family Environment, Attachment styles and Emotional Intelligence among Adults

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Abstract

Family environment plays a major role in the upbringing of a child, what they learn of themselves and the world. Previous researches were found to be focused more on impact of parent child relationship on attachment styles and emotional intelligence, therefore, it is important to understand how different facets of family environment can also impact a child's understanding of relationships and emotions which later strengthen in their adulthood. The aim of the present study was to understand the relationship between family environment, attachment styles and emotional intelligence among adults. The sample included adults in the age range of 20-30 years old (30 male and 30 female) from tricity, India. Standardised tests on family environment, attachment styles and emotional intelligence were provided to the participants. Results revealed a partial support of relationship amongst the three variables, leaving more scope for future researches. While there were a few limitations to the study such as the small sample size, the scales' limitations in presenting the variables in its full spectrum, and possible responder's bias in answering questions around family, relationships and our emotions, the study still has implications for future research by adding more knowledge to attachment theory, helping individuals learn more about themselves in terms of their family,

relationship and emotions and these findings help mental health professionals understand their clients in an in-depth manner.

Keywords: *Family Environment, Attachment Styles, Emotional Intelligence, Adults*

Introduction

W.E.B Du Bois once said that “*Children learn more from what you are than what you teach,*” which holds evidently true to this time. According to John Locke, children are born as *Tabula Rasa* or blank slate and everything they observe forms an impression on them about life, values, relationships, etc. Robert Cardinal supported this by stating that “The family is the first school of virtues.” Family environment can be understood as the space in which a child grows up, where different aspects of family as a whole unit can influence the social, emotional, and cognitive development of a child and who they become as adults.

It is often expressed how parent child relationship or parenting styles can influence a child’s adult attachment style and their emotional intelligence. Very less do we talk about the role of family environment in this. To explore this better, let us first understand what attachment styles and emotional intelligence mean and look like for adults.

Attachment styles can be understood as the bond that was created in early years of an individual that can form a template or structure for how they will build and interpret relationships as an adult. John Bowlby has worked extensively on this concept and found four types of attachment styles: secure, anxious/preoccupied, dismissive, and fearful (where both dismissive and fearful are types of avoidant attachment and the ones except secure fall under insecure attachment styles).

Over the years, there has been an increasing focus on emotional awareness and emotional intelligence of an individual that help them navigate their lives. Emotional Intelligence or EI can be understood as the ability to identify, understand, and navigate your

emotions and that of others. It includes how you understand your and other's emotions as well as use them effectively in a situation that can lead to more interpersonal and intrapersonal growth and connectedness further leading to development in emotional part of your mental health.

According to a study by Collins and Read (1990), individuals with secure attachment tend to recognise their emotions and engage in positive emotion regulation where as those with insecure attachment tend not to have a range of emotional competencies to navigate the severity of negative situations. Similarly, those with dismissive attachment experience a strong need for a relationship along with an intense fear of abandonment. Guerrero (1996) added to this by stating that individuals with dismissive attachment hold a deep-seated distrust in their partners' ability to provide emotional and social support.

From the past literature it has been observed that there is a dearth of research on whether family environment can predict emotional intelligence and attachment styles among adults. Previous literature has focused on parenting styles and most studies have been conducted on adolescents. With the help of the current study, the aim is to add to the existing knowledge about how family environment plays a significant role and acts as a contributing factor in the development of emotional intelligence in children and how they use it as adults to navigate both interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships; and the kind of attachment styles people utilise in their close relationships (that go beyond the romantic kind). This can help mental health professionals in exploring the family dynamics to understand their clients' better and tailor their approach as well as allowing individuals to learn more about themselves, allowing them to become more self-aware.

Family Environment

Balda et al. (2019) defined family environment as “the quality and quantity of socio-emotional support and understanding that parents provide to their children within the home.” Minuchin (1974) has defined family environment “as a structural organisation and the roles and boundaries within the family system”. Hetherington (1999) has defined family environment “as the emotional climate and the quality of relationships within the family.” Parke (2004) has defined family environment “as the context within which children learn and develop social and emotional skills.”

There are 10 sub dimensions of family environment, according to Moos and Moos (1986), that include Independence, Achievement Orientation, Intellectual-Cultural Orientation, Active-Recreational Orientation, Moral-Religious Emphasis, Organization, Control, Cohesion, Expressiveness and Conflict. For the current study, we have used Brief Family Relationship Scale, an adaptation of the original FES by utilising only the relationship dimension of the scale, which includes:

1. *Cohesion*: “degree of commitment, help and support family members provide for each other.”
2. *Expressiveness*: “extent to which family members are encourages to act openly and to express their feelings.”
3. *Conflict*: “amount of openly expressed anger, aggression and conflict in the family.”

A study was conducted by Mikulincer and Florian (1999) on the association between parental reports of attachment style and family dynamics and offspring’s reports of adult attachment style. The researchers chose a sample of 98 Israeli young adults who were given the Adult Attachment Scale and FACES III and both the tests were given to their parents as well, along with the conflict and expressiveness subscales of FES. Findings with respect to

family dynamics (as reported by parents) and attachment styles (as reported by offsprings) revealed that high levels of perceived family expressiveness and low family conflict was positively related to secure attachment style in the offsprings. Findings also suggested that low perceived family cohesion, expressiveness and adaptability was related to avoidant attachment style in offsprings and high level of perceived conflict in family was related to anxious-ambivalent attachment style in offsprings as adults.

A study conducted by Kapoor and Sethi (2024) on the impact of family environment on self-esteem and resilience among college day scholars and hostellers. 120 young adults in the age range 18-25 years, were chosen as participants for the study and were given the Family Cohesion scale, Rosenberg's Self Esteem scale and Connor Davidson resilience scale. The collected data was subjected to independent t-test, correlation, and regression analyses. Findings revealed that there is a positive correlation between self-esteem and resilience to the family environment of the participants.

A study conducted by Chandran and Nair (2015) examined whether family climate could predict emotional intelligence in adolescence. 120 adolescents in the age range 16-17 years were randomly chosen from higher secondary schools from Trivandrum district of Kerala and categorised on basis of gender. The sample was given Family Climate Scale and Emotional Intelligence Inventory and the data collected was subjected to correlation and regression. Findings suggested a significant relationship between adolescent's family climate and different dimensions of emotional intelligence except interpersonal efficacy. Further, results from regression analysis suggested maternal affect and sibling relationship as predictors of overall emotional intelligence and interpersonal efficacy whereas paternal affect showed variance in personal efficacy with none of the family climate variables as predictors of interpersonal efficacy.

Attachment Styles

According to Bowlby (1969); Hazan and Shaver (1987); Mikulincer and Shaver (2007), attachment styles is defined “as patterns of emotional and behavioural responses exhibited in close relationships which have significant impacts on psychological and social outcomes including well-being, social support, and relationship satisfaction.” Park et al. (2023) have defined attachment styles as “a key moderator that may influence the degree to which people perceive and respond to social evaluative threat cues in the environment.” Attachment styles is largely originated from attachment theory. Ainsworth et al. (1978); Bowlby (1973); Main et al. (1985) have defined attachment theory as “individuals developing beliefs about themselves- as worthy or unworthy of love and support- and beliefs about others- as responsive or unresponsive- based on early interactions with caregivers.”

According to Fraley and Shaver (2021), “attachment theory describes how enduring beliefs and tendencies around interpersonal relationships develop in infant-caregiver interactions and transfer to other interpersonal relationships.”

Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) proposed a 4-group model of attachment styles in adulthood based on Bowlby’s attachment model. They proposed 4 sub types of attachment styles which were supported by Hazan & Shaver (1987) and Main et al. (1985) in their respective relevant studies. These sub types are:

1. *Secure*: indicates “a sense of worthiness (lovability) plus an expectation that other people are generally accepting and responsive.”
2. *Anxious-Ambivalent/Preoccupied*: indicates “a sense of unworthiness (unlovability) combined with a positive evaluation of others. It leads the person to strive for self-acceptance by gaining the acceptance of valued others.”

3. *Fearful-Avoidant*: indicates “a sense of unworthiness (unlovability) combined with an expectation that others will be negatively disposed (untrustworthy and rejecting). These people try to protect themselves against anticipated rejection by others.”
4. *Dismissive-Avoidant*: indicates “a sense of love-worthiness combined with a negative disposition towards other people. These people protect themselves against disappointment by avoiding close relationships and maintaining a sense of independence and invulnerability.”

Diehl et al. (1998) conducted a study to examine the mean differences in family climate and personality variables based on an individuals' attachment style as well as any differences because of age group. A sample of 304 adults were chosen. Findings suggested effects of attachment style but no interaction between attachment style and age group. Further results showed that individuals with a secure attachment style described their family of origin and current family more positively and scored higher on personality variables that indicated self-confidence, psychological well-being and functioning in the social world as compared to individuals with insecure attachment style. For the purpose of the study, when family climate and personality variables were included, findings provided evidence for positive and negative self-model as well as other model as important dimensions of adult attachment system.

A study was conducted by Vasquez et al. (2002) to examine the role of adult attachment style in meeting the challenges of both work and family roles for parents of young children. A large sample of adults in committed relationships were chosen and studied longitudinally to assess satisfaction with work, with family, stress, and role overload. Findings suggest most parents with secure attachment styles are able to function in different domains successfully. At the same time, women and men with fearful attachment styles have marked difficulty in different family domains and some work domains.

Doinita (2015) conducted a study to examine the correlations between types of adult attachment, self-esteem level and emotional intelligence development. 65 adults were chosen as sample and were given the Adult Attachment Scale, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and Emotional Intelligence Test. Findings suggested that the types of adult attachment influenced self-esteem level and the emotional intelligence development.

Emotional Intelligence

Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined emotional intelligence as “ability at perceiving, assimilating, understanding, and managing emotions to better guide one’s mind and behaviour.” Goleman (1995) defined emotional intelligence as “being able to rein in emotional impulse; to read another’s innermost feelings, to handle relationships smoothly.” Bar-On (1997) defined emotional intelligence as “a set of non-cognitive abilities and competences that influence the ability to be successful in coping with environmental demands and pressures, and it is composed of five key composed: intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, adaptation skills, stress management skills and general mood.”

Wong and Law (2002) developed the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) with EI divided across four dimensions:

1. *Self-Emotion Appraisals*: “ability to understand deep emotions and to express these emotions naturally.”
2. *Others’ Emotion Appraisals*: “ability to perceive and understand emotions of others.”
3. *Regulation of Emotion*: “ability to self-regulate emotions, enabling a rapid recovery from psychological distress.”
4. *Use of Emotion*: “individuals’ ability to make use of their emotions by directing them towards constructive activities and personal performance.”

Ruiz and Esteban (2018) conducted a study to analyse the relationship between emotional intelligence and family environment. A sample of 127 adolescents were chosen from Peru and they were provided with the adapted versions of Family Environment Scale and Emotional Intelligence Scale. Data collected was subjected to correlation and further Student's t test to assess gender and family structure differences on both the variables. Findings revealed gender differences on empathy and social skills, and family structure differences on self-regulation and self-motivation. Lastly, the findings revealed a direct positive correlation between family environment and emotional intelligence.

According to a study by Azadi and Tehrani (2010), relationship between emotional intelligence and attachment style was studied. A sample of 262 females and 238 males who were university students were chosen and were provided the Bar-On EQ Inventory and Attachment Style questionnaire. Findings revealed that for both the genders, EI was positively correlated with secure attachment and negatively with avoidant and ambivalent attachment. Further regression analyses revealed that ambivalent, avoidant, and secure attachment styles can be attributed to 25% and 17% of variance in EI among females and males.

Sloan (2020) conducted a study to examine emotional intelligence of adults raised in dual parent households, single mother households, and single father households. 475 participants from dual parent, single mother, and single father households responded to different measures around emotional intelligence, emotional competence, subjective happiness, and perceived quality of relationships. Findings indicated that individuals raised in dual parent households had significantly higher EI than those raised in single parent households and no significant difference was found in EI between adults raised in single mother homes compared to single father homes.

Purpose

The purpose of the current research is to study the role of family environment on the attachment styles and emotional intelligence among adults.

Hypothesis

1. There is no relationship between family environment, attachment styles and emotional intelligence.
2. There is a relationship between family environment, attachment styles and emotional intelligence.

Method

Sample

A total sample of 60 (30 male and 30 female) in the age range of 20-30 years was collected from tricity, India.

Measure

Brief Family Relationship Scale: Developed by Fok et al. (2011), is an adaptation of the 27-item Relationship dimension of Family Environment Scale by Moos & Moos (1994). The brief version of the scale was developed by investigating the dimension for Alaska Native youth. The BFRS consists of 19 items that assesses three aspects, Cohesion (8 items); Expressiveness (4 items) and Conflict (7 items). The original study removed 3 items to suit their analyses which were included for the purpose of the current study. The responses for the scale lie on a linear scale ranging from 0 being Not at all to 3 being A lot. Scores are calculated by adding the scores from each subscale while keeping in mind that conflict subscale is reverse scored and the scores are then classified as low, average, or high from the range of 16 to 48 for each sub scale.

Relationship Scale Questionnaire: Developed by Griffin and Bartholomew (1994), the scale contains 30 items in the form of short statements. On a 5-point Likert scale, participants rate the extent to which each statement best describes them in their close relationships. The range of responses go from 1- Not at all like me; 2- Rarely like me; 3- Somewhat like me; 4- Often like me; 5-Very like me. The scale examines different attachment styles with different questions- secure attachment; preoccupied; avoidance/dismissive and fearful avoidance. For scoring, the mean for the specific items of each style is calculated and it is also kept in mind that items 9, 28 and 6 have reverse scoring.

Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale: Developed by Wong and Law (2002), contains 16 items that provide a short measure of emotional intelligence. On a 7-point Likert scale, participants choose the response that is most accurate for them. The range of responses go from 1 being Strongly Disagree to 7 being Strongly Agree. The scale measures four sub dimensions in the order of the questions, namely, Self Emotions appraisal; Regulation of emotions; Use of Emotions and Others-emotion appraisal. Scoring of scale involves calculating mean for each sub dimension, where a high score would indicate high ability on that dimension. Internal consistency reliability ranged from 0.83 to 0.90, according to Wong and Law, 2002.

Procedure

The participants were informed about the purpose of research & the questionnaires were filled through Google forms. Each participant was thanked for cooperation & their kind help. Standardised psychological tests were administered to the participants. The data collected was later subjected to statistical analyses and further interpretation of the results.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Results

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics for all the variables*

	GENDER	COHESION	EXPRESSIVENESS	CONFLICT	ANXIOUS AMBIVALENT	DISMISSIVE	FEARFUL AVOIDANT	SECURE	SELF- EMOTIONS	REGULATION OF EMOTIONS	USE OF EMOTIONS	OTHER'S EMOTIONS
N	Female	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
	Male	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Mean	Female	2.01	1.79	1.49	2.79	3.21	2.92	3.09	5.02	5.53	4.95	4.31
	Male	2.29	1.94	1.68	2.72	3.11	2.94	2.80	5.03	5.03	4.72	4.87
Standard deviation	Female	0.719	0.755	0.710	0.486	0.530	1.06	0.458	1.39	1.30	1.55	1.38
	Male	0.582	0.718	0.495	0.522	0.580	0.923	0.673	1.59	1.59	1.64	1.58

Table 2. *Correlation between Family environment, attachment styles and Emotional Intelligence*

	COHESION	EXPRESSIVENESS	CONFLICT	ANXIOUS AMBIVALENT	DISMISSIVE	FEARFUL AVOIDANT	SECURE	SELF- EMOTIONS	REGULATION OF EMOTIONS	USE OF EMOTIONS	OTHER'S EMOTIONS
COHESION	—										
EXPRESSIVENESS	0.770***	—									
CONFLICT	0.428***	0.345**	—								
ANXIOUS AMBIVALENT	-0.297*	-0.229	-0.106	—							
DISMISSIVE	-0.174	-0.066	-0.093	0.528***	—						
FEARFUL AVOIDANT	-0.305*	-0.175	-0.170	0.588***	0.744***	—					
SECURE	-0.243	-0.040	-0.243	0.232	0.259*	0.194	—				
SELF-EMOTIONS	-0.108	-0.003	-0.092	0.091	0.096	0.099	0.390**	—			
REGULATION OF EMOTIONS	-0.151	0.018	-0.171	0.273*	0.292*	0.271*	0.495***	0.762***	—		
USE OF EMOTIONS	-0.002	0.115	0.126	0.175	0.118	-0.042	0.223	0.411**	0.447***	—	
OTHER'S EMOTIONS	-0.147	-0.142	0.093	0.261*	0.115	0.174	0.103	0.648***	0.523***	0.507***	—
Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$											

Discussion of Results

The aim of the current study was to assess and understand the role family environment plays in the attachment styles and emotional intelligence of adults. Each variable was studied in terms of its sub dimensions where cohesion, expressiveness and conflict were under family environment; anxious-ambivalent, dismissive, fearful avoidant and secure were under attachment styles; and self-emotions, regulation of emotions, use of emotions and other's emotions were under emotional intelligence. The objectives included assessing if there is a relationship between the variables- family environment, attachment styles and emotional intelligence among adults from 20-30 year old age range.

According to table 2, that was measuring correlation between variables, we can observe that there is significant negative correlation between cohesion and anxious ambivalent attachment style ($r=0.297$, $p<0.05$) as well as between cohesion and fearful avoidant attachment style ($r=0.305$, $p<0.05$). This suggests that lower levels of family cohesion are associated with greater insecurity or avoidance in attachment patterns.

The results also found out a negative correlation between cohesion and other sub dimensions of the two variables, that is, dismissive and secure attachment style, self-emotions, regulation of emotions, use of emotions and other's emotions; however, the correlation found is not significant enough. This finding can probably be attributed to the fact that other factors such as parental sensitivity or other complex facets of family environment might have played a more critical role.

For the expressiveness dimension of family environment, while none of the findings were correlated significantly, we can see that there is a negative correlation between expressiveness and all the four attachment styles and self-emotions and other's emotions; and a positive correlation between expressiveness and regulation of emotions and use of emotions.

This finding can possibly due to some family environments that do not promote expressiveness but the children, later adults, learn to regulate and use their emotions effectively but are not well equipped with empathising with their and other's emotions; and a lack of open emotional communication may hinder development for secure attachment styles.

Similarly, for the conflict dimension, none of the findings were significant but results found a negative correlation between conflict and the four attachment styles and self-emotions and regulation of emotions dimension of emotional intelligence; and a positive correlation between conflict and use of emotions and other's emotions. This indicates that higher conflict in a family can lead to less secure attachment style, while it is unexpected to see negative correlation with dismissive and anxious and avoidant attachment style as well making us wonder that for the current sample, possibly there was an inclination towards anxious ambivalent style and fearful avoidant style but it was not strong enough. Also, a higher conflict in family can lead to less focus and understanding of emotions of self and its regulation but the children, later adults, might have learnt how to use their emotions effectively and understand that of others to adjust well in the social world.

While the study found some negative correlations with expressiveness and conflict, these were not statistically significant. This differs from Esh's (2021) findings, which showed significant positive associations between emotional intelligence and the family environment dimensions, part of which was found to be true in our study for cohesion dimension. This discrepancy may be due to differences in sample characteristics or measurement tools.

Further, results from table 2 found positive correlation between anxious ambivalent attachment style and four dimensions of emotional intelligence with significant positive correlation between anxious ambivalent style and regulation of emotions ($r=0.273$, $p<0.05$) as well as with other's emotions ($r=0.261$, $p<0.05$). This can be explained with the possibility that

individuals with more anxious ambivalent attachment style tend to regulate their emotions more and focus more on understanding other's emotions because of their possibly heightened empathy from their end or they learn emotion regulation skills as a coping mechanism to regulate the anxiety of relationships. Similarly, for dismissive attachment style, results showed positive correlation with the four dimensions of emotional intelligence and a significantly positive correlation between dismissive attachment style and regulation of emotions ($r=0.292$, $p<0.05$). It is possible that such individuals as an adult learned how to regulate their emotions for themselves with lesser emphasis on other facets of EI.

For fearful avoidant attachment style, the results found that it positively correlated with self-emotions and other's emotions, with a significant positive correlation between fearful avoidant attachment and regulation of emotions ($r=0.271$, $p<0.05$) and no significant but negative correlation with use of emotions. The reason behind this finding can be that individuals with fearful avoidant attachment style learned how to regulate their emotions to try and maintain their relationships but with a lack in understanding how to use the emotions effectively. Lastly, for secure attachment style, results showed a significant positive correlation between secure attachment style and self-emotions ($r=0.390$, $r<0.01$) as well as regulation of emotions ($r=0.495$, $p<0.001$) while with the remaining two dimensions of emotional intelligence, there was found to be a positive correlation but it was not significant enough. As expected, this finding shows a strong relationship where a secure attachment style helps with understanding our emotions as well as regulate them effectively. This finding aligns with Esh's (2021) findings, which indicated that higher emotional intelligence was associated with more secure attachment.

Limitations and future implications

One of the major limitations of this study was that the scoring of RSQ was understood from the work of Fok et al. (1995) which had a few consistencies. Item 6 (“I am comfortable without close emotional relationships”) was excluded from their analysis due to its lack of significance loading on any of the four factors/attachment styles, possibly leading to non-significant results in our study. Similarly for item 7 (“I am not sure that I can always depend on others to be there when I need them”) and item 17 (“people are never there when you need them”) which were found to be loading onto secure attachment style were possibly intended to be reverse scored but this was not explicitly mentioned in the original paper leading to inconsistencies in our findings and interpretations. Further research might help by looking into an alternative interpretation of the items or by re-conducting a factor analysis.

Another limitation can be the responder bias stemming out of responding to variables such as family environment, relationships and EI that are all subjective in nature. Lastly, the scales used were limited in their essence to cover the full spectrum of the variables to give us more concrete information with a small sample size.

Our current study leaves room for future research by looking into the complexities of each variable and doing a more in-depth analysis of the relationship amongst the variables. Additionally, the current sample was collected from different (tier I) cities, making it difficult to generalise the findings for all the adults, therefore, future research can include more people from tier II and tier III cities as well and collect data through other means such as surveys and interviews as well to corroborate the findings with better evidence and less subjectivity.

Researching more on the current study can help individuals understand about their family dynamics and their attachment patterns in other forms of relationships such as friendships and romantic as well as provide them with an understanding of their emotions with

respect to self and others. It can help individuals improve their family dynamics by providing parents with enough knowledge to intervene and aim at strengthening the family, at the same time, individuals with a better understanding of their emotions can lead to enhancement of their emotional well-being. Therapy, here can play a big role, by helping individuals work on regulating and using their emotions effectively and improve their relationships. Theoretically, the current study would be adding to the knowledge bank of family systems theory, attachment theory and emotional intelligence and opens room to understand more about intergenerational transmission of attachment patterns through generations to allow for more interventions and promoting of healthy family relationships and emotional expression.

Conclusion

The current study aimed to understand the relationship between family environment, attachment styles and emotional intelligence of adults. The results revealed a partial relationship between family environment, attachment styles and emotional intelligence of adults. While results have found significant relationship between some variables of all the variables, it would be helpful to note that the not significant results or the unexpected results could have been due to the unexplored complexities of each variable, further making room for future research.

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