Determining Connections between Attachments in Romantic Relationships and Emotional Intelligence in Female University Students

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author DD designed the study,
performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol and wrote the first draft of the manuscript.
Authors MZ and MM managed the analyses of the study. Author DD managed the literature searches.
All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the research is to determine whether there is a statistically significant relationship between attachment and emotional intelligence. We used a revised questionnaire (ECR-R) to determine the relationship and we used the TEIQue-SF questionnaire to determine emotional intelligence. The research sample consisted of 260 respondents from 22 to 25 years, where the average age was 23.45 years. Within the results, we found that there is a moderately strong negative relationship between avoidant attachment and emotional intelligence and a strong negative relationship between anxious attachment and emotional intelligence.

Keywords: Attachment; emotional intelligence; mutual connections; female college students.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In adulthood, the primary attachment shifts from a one-way relationship to a two-way relationship, and the most significant change is in romantic relationships [1,2]. Attachment and explanation of romantic relationships in adulthood were first used by Hazan and Shaver in 1987 [1]. In adults, there is mainly attachment represented by two orthogonal dimensions, namely anxiety and avoidance [3,4,5]. It is characteristic of the avoidant type that getting closer to his partner evokes unpleasant emotions, he cannot create intimate relationships. Within anxious attachment, uncertainty, fear of loneliness and failure often arise, which is often manifested by fear of separation [6]. Emotional intelligence consists of patterns of behavior and personal skills that determine interpersonal behavior, for example, behavior in romantic relationships [7]. It shows individual differences in people's knowledge and their ability to perceive and understand emotions. It is about their ability to appropriately incorporate emotional knowledge into behavior in a particular situation with more or less effective results [8]. With higher emotional intelligence, individuals know how to handle emotions better and with more skill. For this reason, they can use their emotions to achieve life goals, such as satisfaction in romantic relationships [8,9,10]. From the point of view of attachment theory, insecure individuals are constantly seeking the support of a partner; although the partner is not perceived as close enough to fulfill the function of a safe harbor and a safe base [11,7]. The safely attached show a higher level of emotional intelligence, ie they perceive better, have a greater understanding than those with insecure attachment [12]. The study of relationship and emotional intelligence has been the subject of several studies [12,13], which confirmed the existence of the given relationship. Research by [5,8,9], in turn, confirmed with correlations that attachment significantly affects emotional intelligence. The main goal of our work was to find out whether there is a significant connection between variables (attachment and emotional intelligence). In our research, we formulated 2 hypotheses in which we focused on whether emotional intelligence is related to attachment.

H1: There is a statistically significant connection in a negative direction between avoidant attachment and the overall level of emotional intelligence.

H2: There is a statistically significant connection in a negative direction between anxious attachment and the overall level of emotional intelligence.

2. METHODS

2.1 Research File

The research sample we chose for our research was made up mainly of university students from the University of St. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Trnava University and Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra. We selected the respondents through deliberate selection. Out of the total number of 300 respondents, 40 respondents were excluded due to incomplete completion of questionnaires, or failure to meet the basic aspects focused on the comparability of the sample. Finally, 260 respondents from 22 to 25 years of age participated in our research, where the average age was 23.45 years. As part of the research, we focused on female students who were comparable in terms of field of study, school, age, and location in which they live. All respondents were in a relationship that lasted more than 1 year. The maximum length of the relationship with our respondents was 4 years.

2.2 Materials and Apparatus

The operationalization of the researched concepts is not easy, but for the purposes of our research it is as follows:

Emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive one's own emotions and the emotions of others; ability to understand; element of human behavior, has a huge impact on success in life but also on our happiness, relationships and work [7,3]. The more we use emotional intelligence, the better we will get along with our surroundings, family, partner and colleagues.

We work with attachment on two dimensions - anxiety and avoidance. Avoidant attachment is characterized by the fact that an individual is uncomfortable being close to other people and finds it difficult to fully trust someone as well as allow them to be dependent on another person. He is nervous if he gets too close to someone [6]. The third type is anxious attachment. An individual with this type of attachment has a feeling that others are reluctant to get as close as he would like. This is also manifested by the fear, for example in a relationship, that the partner

does not love him enough or that he will not want to stay with him [6,14].

We used the emotional intelligence questionnaire - TEIQue-Short Form (TEIQue-SF) to detect emotional intelligence and we used The Experiences in Close Relationships Scale-Revised (ECR-R) to determine attachment.

TEIQue-SF consists of 30 questionnaire questions and consists of 4 subscales: well-being / personal well-being, emotionality, sociability, self-control. The original version of Petrides (2001, [15]) was standardized in Slovak [16]. In TEIQ-SF, the respondent uses a 7-point scale in individual items, it is designed to measure the global trait emotional intelligence. Its evaluation takes about 7-10 minutes. The questionnaire is an important part of research in the field of emotional intelligence (Cooper, Petrides, 2010). The questionnaire can be administered in groups as well as individually, in the traditional "pencil-paper" for or online [15].

The authors of the revised ECR-R questionnaire are [4]. The questionnaire focuses on experiencing close relationships, but in general. It does not necessarily focus only on experiencing the current relationship. It consists of 36 items, each on a 7-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The first 18 items focus on the anxiety scale - that is, anxious attachment, and items 19-36 focus on the avoidance scale - that is, avoidant attachment.

2.3 Procedure

The research was carried out in January and February 2020. All respondents filled out the battery in printed form - "pencil - paper". The administrative requirement in selecting the respondents was that they complete all the tests alone, so that they were not accidentally influenced or distorted by the other partner. We evaluated the TEIQue-SF, ECR-R questionnaires using the recommended evaluation manuals. In addition to the research methodological battery, which we administered to the respondents, a questionnaire was also included, which was of an informative and demographic nature.

- Age of responded
- Length of the relationship
- Education

We processed the quantitative data we obtained from the respondents by filling in their questionnaires on attachment and emotional intelligence using a statistical program called IBM SPSS Statistic 22.

In our research, we also used correlation research to determine the connection between attachment and the level of emotional intelligence. We interpreted the relationships between variables based on the scheme:

Value to 0.3 .... mild dependence.
Value from 0.3 to 0.6 .....medium dependence.
Value above 0.6.............strong dependence [17].

3. RESULTS

Hypothesis H1 was formulated as follows: There is a statistically significant connection in a negative direction between avoidant attachment and the overall level of emotional intelligence.

In this case, too, we tested the normality, which was not confirmed in this case. Due to this fact, we used a nonparametric Spearman correlation analysis (Table 1). Based on the results, we can state that there is a negative moderately strong relationship between the variables ($\rho = -0.45$; $p = 0.000$), so we accept hypothesis H2. We can say that the higher the score in emotional intelligence, the lower the level of avoidant attachment.

In H2, we investigated: *There is a statistically significant connection in a negative direction between anxious attachment and the overall level of emotional intelligence.* Normality was not confirmed in this case. Therefore, we used nonparametric Spearman correlation analysis (Table 2). Based on the results, we can state that there is a negative strong relationship between the variables ($\rho = -0.57$; $p = 0.000$), so we accept hypothesis H2. We can say that the higher the score in emotional intelligence, the lower the level of anxious attachment.

Table 1. Spearman correlation analysis - AA, emotional intelligence

		Emotional intelligence
Avoidant attachment	Correlation coefficient	-0.45[**]
	Sig.	0.000
	N	130

*** the correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-way)*

Table 2. Spearman correlation analysis - AA, emotional intelligence

		Emotional intelligence
Anxious attachment	Correlation coefficient	-0.57**
	Sig.	0.000
	N	130

*** the correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-way)*

4. DISCUSSION

We worked with the concepts: attachment and emotional intelligence. The main goal was to find out whether the individual variables are related to each other. We measured attachment using a questionnaire called (ECR-R) and emotional intelligence using a questionnaire (TEIQue-SF). Problems and dissatisfaction in close relationships can contribute to increased stress and have been identified as an impetus that can lead people to seek out mental health professionals [18]. [19], in turn, stated that difficulties in relationships and relationship satisfaction are one of the most common problems of individuals seeking psychotherapy [19]. Based on these problems, various existing theories, and research, we have identified hypotheses that have already addressed similar issues.

In our first and second hypotheses, we sought to determine whether there is a statistically significant relationship between attachment (avoidant and anxious) and emotional intelligence. Using Spearman's correlation analysis, we found that there is a negative moderately strong relationship between avoidant attachment and emotional intelligence, and thus we accept H1. Using Spearman's correlation analysis, we again found that even between the anxious attachment and emotional intelligence, there is a negative relationship, and so we accept H2. The result of study can say that the higher the scores of the respondents in the emotional intelligence questionnaire, the lower the level in the attachment, whether avoidant or anxious. The result can be explained by the fact that people with avoidant attachment tend to have cold relationships, keep their distance from people, are nervous about communicating with others, and achieve low scores on emotional intelligence, as emotional intelligence also involves communicating with other people. We compared the results of our research with the research of [20,8,9]. Our finding is consistent with the findings of [20] where it was found that there is a connection between attachment and

emotional intelligence. 116 employees were randomly selected, of which 48 were men and 68 women. By Pearson correlation and regression analysis, the results showed a higher score in the subscales of attachment, and this represents a higher level of all types of attachments.

- Secure attachment is positively related to interpersonal, intrapersonal and emotional intelligence.
- Dismissing avoidant attachment is negatively related to interpersonal and emotional intelligence.
- Fearful avoidant attachment is negatively related to intrapersonal, intrapersonal, emotional intelligence, adaptability and stress management.
- Preoccupied attachment is positively related to interpersonal emotional intelligence, but negatively related to the adaptability of emotional intelligence.

The findings of our research are similar to the research of [8,9] where the aim of their research was to examine whether attachment styles can assume emotional intelligence. The study involved 463 respondents, of which 272 were women and 191 men with a university degree from Selcuk University. By regression and correlation, the results indicated that there was a significant positive correlation between secure attachment and all scales of emotional intelligence. The results also suggested that attachment styles significantly explained emotional intelligence and secure attachment as a predictor of all subscales of emotional intelligence. Based on the results of our research and the results of [20,8,9], it follows that there are connections between attachment and emotional intelligence.

5. LIMITATIONS

After completing the research, we considered the various limitations that are in our work and which we are aware of. As part of the research, we worked with the collected data using the "pencil - paper" method, which was unpleasant for many

participants because they are used to working with a PC rather than writing out questionnaires. This research is cross-sectional, meaning that data from each respondent were collected at one point in time. Although this method of data collection is relatively simple, there is no way to collect data at a later date to verify the accuracy and stability of the preceding responses.

We had data from respondents who subjectively evaluated themselves in the research and this can have several disadvantages. Data can be influenced by individual factors and bias. For example, respondents may respond to what they perceive to be socially desirable in such a way that they can exaggerate their reactions in a positive direction because they do not want to portray themselves as negative individuals. A positive self-assessment can also be a form of self-protection. Participants' responses may also be influenced by their mood during the data collection period. If the participant has a particularly bad day or has had an argument with a partner, he may react more negatively to some items, but he would not react in this way on a normal day.

6. APPLICATION FOR PSYCHOLOGY AND ITS PRACTICE

Based on the results of our thesis, clinical psychologists could work more accurately with attachment of the client. Paying special attention to avoidant attachment when working with certain difficulties, such as dissatisfaction in a relationship. Understanding that evasive attachment contributes negatively to the client's relationships. This can be useful in therapeutic work (conceptualization of the client performing the intervention). For example, if a client with anxious attachment has characteristic behavior and emotional expression, the therapist can help increase the client's satisfaction in a relationship by exploring his or her emotions and learning to express the client's emotions. In addition, understanding the relationship between avoidance and satisfaction would be relevant to multiple therapeutic contexts (eg, individual therapies, group therapies, couple therapies) and different treatments (eg, psychoeducation, focusing emotions on work). Arnd-Caddigan's research suggests that the strength of a therapeutic alliance influences treatment success [21]. "Individuals with more secure attachment styles tend to develop a stronger strategy, while individuals with less secure attachment styles tend to develop weaker alliances" [22]. For this

reason, clinical counselors, therapists, should assess attachment style in the therapeutic relationship and pay special attention to the bond of the client with avoidant attachment [23].

7. CONCLUSION RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE INTENTIONS

If we wanted to do similar research in the future, we would consider a more appropriate selection of the research sample so that we have the same number of men and the same number of women. Perhaps interesting for future research could be to test our research sample a few years later and see if we observe any changes in the sample of adolescents, for example, after starting a job or marriage, starting a family.

For future research on attachment and emotional intelligence, students could explore the relationship between these two variables to identify overlapping constructs or develop emotional intelligence as a construct. Because we used a trait model of emotional intelligence in the research, we could use the model of emotional intelligence as an ability in the following study. The ability of emotional intelligence states that individuals differ in their ability to process emotional information and that this ability manifests itself in varying degrees of adaptive behavior [24,25]. This model is based on actual observed abilities rather than personality traits and thus may not be prone to subjective limits.

CONSENT

Informed and written participant consent were collected and preserved by the authors.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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