

Attachment Styles and their Demographic Association Among Adult Children of Alcoholic Fathers in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: To study the relationship between demographics and attachment styles among adult children of alcoholic fathers.
Study Design: Cross-sectional study.

Place and Duration of Study: Private Rehabilitation Centers, Lahore Pakistan, from Jan to Apr 2020.

Methodology: A sample of almost equal participation of both genders (202 males and 198 females) were included in the study. Two measuring tools were used, a Demographic questionnaire and the Adult Attachment questionnaire.

Results: Chi-square test indicated that attachment style was significantly associated with age [$p < 0.001$], education [$p < 0.001$], and birth order [$p < 0.001$], However, gender [$p = 0.374$] and number of siblings [$p = 0.876$] were not significantly associated.

Conclusion: There is a relationship between attachment styles and associated demographics of adult children of alcoholic fathers. Based on these findings, the alcoholics and their families could be educated, an intervention plan could be developed, and literature could educate the masses about alcoholism and its impact on children.

Keywords: Alcoholism, Attachment styles, Children of alcoholics, Pakistan

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INTRODUCTION

Despite being banned, alcoholism is a growing problem in Pakistan.¹ Alcoholism is a chronic relapsing mental disorder that involves incessant drinking despite the consequences and an urge to consume more to experience similar results while experiencing withdrawal symptoms when one tries to lessen or cease drinking.²

Children growing up in a family with alcoholism may end up facing negative consequences of distress, worry, and anxiety.³ As proven by research, environment and demographics play a vital role in the upbringing of children, such as maltreatment, negligence, mistreatment at the hands of the family, age, birth order, gender, and education.⁴

Children of alcohol-abusing fathers are at higher risk of harmful consequences, and insecure attachments in Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOAs) are among the common factors. However, there is insufficient evidence to indicate the effect of alcohol abuse by mothers on the daughters' attachment in their old age.⁵ This gap in the research might reflect alcohol consumption viewed as a "men" problem,⁶ and due to this misconception, mothers are an understudied area for alcohol abuse.⁷

The research zone has significant gaps in data related to gender differences, especially regarding the impact of gender on the influence of parental alcoholism on COAs.⁸ Moreover, age, birth order and education are strongly linked with attachment styles.⁹ Finally, economic factors strongly link familial socioeconomic status (SES) and alcohol dependency. Research indicates that children from wealthy families are probably at higher risk for substance use, avoidant attachment style, and stress.¹⁰

This research will help explore the relationship between alcoholism of fathers with various demographics in Pakistan and the subsequent effects on their children. From this, we may understand the mental health status and issues COAs face in their personal and social relationships. The current research aimed to study the relationship between demographics and attachment styles among adult children of alcoholic fathers.

METHODOLOGY

This cross sectional study was conducted at the Private Rehabilitation Centres in Lahore Pakistan, from January to April 2020. The research proposal was reviewed by the Ethical Research Committee (ERC-BOS-06-2020-84). In addition, the participants were briefed about the study, and informed consent was sought, informed of their voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time, and ensured

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Demographic Association Among Adult

confidentiality and anonymity. Convenient consecutive sampling was used to select the sample for the selective and vulnerable population.

Inclusion Criteria: Participants of either gender, age 18 to 25 years, education (matric/10th grade as the minimum level), and fathers who were undergoing treatment for alcoholism only for at least a second time were included in the study. Moreover, the inclusion was also based on the family system (nuclear) and the number of siblings (at least three).

Exclusion Criteria: Those participants whose fathers were undergoing their first treatment for alcoholism, polydrug users' children were excluded from the study. Furthermore, those whose parents were divorced or living in a joint family system or with less than three siblings were also excluded from the study.

A triangulation approach was used to establish the inclusion criteria.¹¹ The criteria were set to have a homogenous group of adult children of alcoholics. The triangulation approach was based on the demographic characteristics of the participants, the alcoholic and the family. The fathers had to be admitted to treatment for alcoholism only. The characteristics of the controlled family were based on the family system and the number of children. It had to be a nuclear family system and three as the minimum number of siblings. The current study used two measuring tools: the demographic questionnaire and the Adult Attachment questionnaire.

The demographic questionnaire comprised gender, age, education, number of siblings, birth order, and family system.

Adult Attachment Questionnaire was used to measure the adult attachment of the sample with three vignettes as three items; avoidant, ambivalent/anxious and secure attachment styles.¹²

The researchers contacted the rehabilitation centres via phone and set an appointment. During the meeting, they were briefed about the rationale of the study and were shown the questionnaires. They were told that the researchers would come to collect the data at the time slots scheduled by the institute. Moreover, they were briefed and reassured that the data collection would not hinder the daily workings of the centre and that it would take 15 minutes or so to complete the filling of the forms for each participant. As part of the briefing, they were informed that information identifying the institution, staff or patients was not required.

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.0 was used for the data analysis. Quantitative variables were summarized as mean±SD and qualitative variables were summarized as frequency and percentages. Chi-square test was applied to find out the association. The *p*-value of ≤0.05 was considered statistically significant.

RESULTS

There were 400 study participants, with approximately equal numbers of men (202; 50.5%) and women (198; 49.5%). Average age was 21.45±2.37 years. The median age split produced two groups: 18-21 year-olds (201; 50.2%) and 22-25 year-olds (199; 49.8%). The most common level of education was intermediate (144; 36%) and graduation (131; 32.8%). Most participants had between 4 and 5 siblings (26.3% and 32.8%, respectively) (Table-I).

Table-I: Descriptive Statistics of Study Participants (n=400)

Variables	Frequency (%)
Age	21.45±2.37 Years
Age groups (years)	
18-21	201 (50.2)
22-25	199 (49.8)
Gender	
Men	202 (50.5)
Women	198 (49.5)
Level of Education	
Matric	65 (16.2)
Intermediate	144 (36.0)
Graduation	131 (32.8)
Masters	60 (15.0)
Number of Siblings	
1	1 (0.3)
2	7 (1.8)
3	77 (19.3)
4	105 (26.3)
5	131 (32.8)
6	70 (17.5)
7	9 (2.3)
Sibling Grouping	
1-4	189 (47.3)
5-7	211 (52.8)

Chi-square test indicated that attachment style was significantly associated with age [*p*<0.001], education [*p*<0.001], and birth order [*p*<0.001], However, gender [*p*=0.374] and number of siblings [*p*=0.876] were not significantly associated (Table-II). Percentage of attachment style in age groups was shown in the Figure-1. Percentage of education level within attachment style was shown in the Figure-2

Demographic Association Among Adult

Table-II: Association of Demographic Variables and Attachment Styles (n=400)

Variables	Secure	Avoidant n (%)	Anxious/Ambivalent n (%)	p-value
Age Groups				
18-21	92(65.7)	62(41.3)	47(42.7)	<0.001
22-25	48(34.3)	88(58.7)	63(57.3)	
Gender				
Male	71(50.7)	69(46.7)	61(55.5)	ns
Female	70(49.3)	80(53.3)	49(44.5)	
Education				
Matric	30(21.4)	13(8.7)	22(20.0)	<0.001
Intermediate	58(41.4)	40(26.7)	46(41.8)	
Graduation	26(18.6)	66(44)	39(35.5)	
Master	26(18.6)	31(20.7)	3(2.7)	
Sibling Group				
1-4	66(47.1)	73(48.7)	50(45.5)	ns
5-7	74(52.9)	77(51.3)	60(54.5)	
Birth Order				
First	43(30.7)	57(38.0)	0(0)	<0.001
Last	57(40.7)	79(52.7)	106(96.4)	
Other	40(28.6)	14(9.3)	4(3.6)	

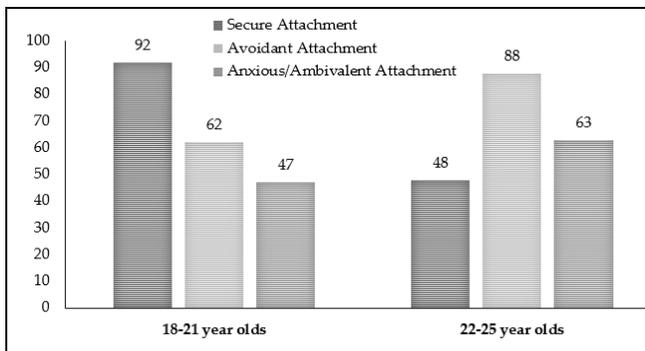


Figure-1: Percentage of Attachment Style in Age Groups (n=400)

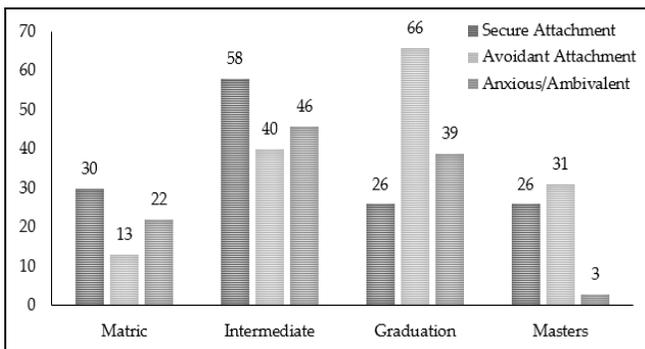


Figure-2: Percentage of Education Level within Attachment Style (n=400)

DISCUSSION

The objective of the current study was to determine a relationship between demographics and

attachment styles among adult children of alcoholic fathers. Many factors play their role in developing the critical parent-child relationship, such as age group, education and birth order,^{11,12} subsequently, the study aimed to determine the effects experienced by children of varying demographics in Pakistan about fathers with alcoholism.

Despite the other dynamics of the family, age difference among COAs plays a key role in determining attachment orientation. As young adults are closer to their fathers than older adults,^{13,14} cognitive maturity with age defines the parent-child relationship more critically. Our results indicated a significant difference between the two age Groups. In the 18-21 years Age-Group, adult children of alcoholics were more securely attached, and the 22-25 years Age Group manifested either more avoidant or anxious ambivalent attachment styles. These findings are in line with previous research, which holds the fact that alcoholism is a progressive disease and as it gets worse, so does the parent-child relationship, which means that the older group had probably faced more negligence and lack of warmth due to the father's progressive and deteriorating alcoholism.^{15,16} These findings can be highlighted in light of the study that explains that adult children of alcoholics (ACOAs) carry troubled and broken relationships.

Moreover, the idea of co-dependency is found to be a major predictor of relational problems. In parallel, various studies have emphasized that childhood experiences differ as age increases. As a result, it influences attitudes and behaviours, consequently adopting different attachment styles.

The results showed no connection between gender and attachment style. In the literature, other studies showed similar results.¹⁷ Studies have emphasized that factors such as schemas and inner experiences with parents, achieved with the help of communication with the parents/guardians over time as more durable compared to the role of gender.¹⁸

The relationship between education and attachment style was found to be significant. Some studies claim that parents /guardians' involvement is not very significant in the lives of children's academics and attachment styles. On the contrary, some statistics assert that the role of parents/guardians' has an important contribution to children's academics and attachment styles. Studies have shown a significant relationship between secure attachment and academics. Recent

research emphasizes that improved performance occurs in diverse zones of children's life.¹⁹ Based on the mentioned studies, it is evident that secure attachment or Anxious/ambivalent attachment because of parents' /guardians' involvement. In addition, Graduates were more likely to have avoidant attachment because of the lack of parents /guardians' involvement.

The relationship between the number of siblings and attachment style was not significant. On the other hand, the relationship between birth order and attachment styles was significant, according to the current study. Surprisingly, some literature indicates no significant relationship between birth order and attachment styles. However, a plethora of data represents a significant relationship between birth order and attachment styles. According to the current research, the last-born children were most likely to report a secure attachment style. Those of other birth order were more likely to fall into the Avoidant and anxious/ambivalent attachments. Due to the lack of research, however, how birth order influenced attachment styles was not stated.²⁰

Overall, family dynamics play a vital role in defining emotional attachment. Each family has various associated factors that may contribute to defining the relationship between child and parent, such as physical presence in the time of need, financial sustainability and care towards each other.

The current study will help mental health professionals educate the masses about the detrimental effects of alcoholism on individuals and children. Moreover, brochures and leaflets could be made giving information about alcoholism, its effects on the individual and the family, and where to get help. This research could act as an impetus for further research. Based on the findings, family counselling programs could be developed and self-help groups for the adult children of alcoholics established.

CONCLUSION

There is a relationship between attachment styles and associated demographics of adult children of alcoholic fathers. Based on these findings, the alcoholics and their families could be educated, an intervention plan could be developed, and literature could educate the masses about alcoholism and its impact on children.

Conflict of Interest: None.

Author's Contribution

Following authors have made substantial contributions to the manuscript as under:

IS: Data acquisition, critical review, approval of the final version to be published.

ESS: Conception, drafting the manuscript, approval of the final version to be published.

SA: Study design, data analysis, critical review, drafting the manuscript, critical review, approval of the final version to be published.

Authors agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

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