



Styles of Attachment and Decision-Making on Quality of Life among College Students

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KEYWORDS

Attachment styles, Decision-making styles, Quality of life, Postgraduates, Graduates

ABSTRACT

This cross-sectional study aimed to investigate the relationship between attachment styles, decision-making styles, and quality of life among college students. A sample of 180 college students, including both graduates and postgraduates, recruited through the unrestricted self-selected survey method completed the Adult Attachment Scale, General Decision-Making Scale, and Quality of Life instrument. The objectives were to examine the prevalence of different attachment and decision-making styles among college students and to explore their associations with quality of life. The results showed that attachment styles were significantly related to decision-making styles, with avoidantly attached students more likely to adopt a rational decision-making approach. The study also found that decision-making styles were associated with quality of life, with the rational decision-making style strongly related to quality of life. These findings highlight the importance of considering both attachment and decision-making styles in understanding college students' quality of life. Furthermore, the study provides evidence that avoidantly attached students can still make effective decisions and have a good quality of life, challenging common misconceptions about their abilities.

Introduction

Attachment theory proposes that a child's relationship with their primary caregiver during early development shapes their internal working model of themselves and others, which influences their future social relationships and development throughout their life (Bowlby 1969). Positive early experiences with caregivers lead to secure attachment and positive internal working models, while negative experiences lead to insecure attachment and negative internal working models (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters and Wall 1978). Attachment theory has also been applied to adult romantic relationships, suggesting that early attachment patterns can influence an individual's relationships in adulthood. Collins and Read's (1990) attachment theory identifies three main attachment styles - secure, anxious, and avoidant - that people can develop based on their early life experiences with caregivers. However, it's important to note that attachment styles can change over time and can also be influenced by factors like culture, personality, and life experiences (Fraley and Roisman 2019). The present study aims to investigate the impact of attachment styles, specifically secure, anxious, and avoidant, on decision-making and quality of life among college students.

Decision-making is a complex process that involves a variety of cognitive functions, such as learning, memory, problem-solving, information collection and processing, and judgement (Simon 1955). It is the process of deciding between multiple options while pursuing a goal, and it is influenced by

various factors such as individual differences, cultural values, and social attitudes (Slovic 1987). Effective decision-making requires evaluating alternatives carefully and implementing the decision at the right time. Decision-making style, which refers to an individual's approach, reaction, and action when making a decision, is closely related to cognitive style and can vary depending on the context and personal variables (Scott and Bruce 1995). There are different decision-making styles, such as rational, intuitive, dependent, avoidant, and spontaneous, and their efficacy can depend on various factors (Scott and Bruce 1995). Understanding decision-making processes and styles is important because decisions heavily influence an individual's life circumstances and well-being.

Quality of life (QoL) is a broad concept that refers to an individual's perception of their position in life within their cultural and value system (WHOQOL Group 1995). Various factors, including stress, can influence QoL. Despite being recognized as a high-stress period, little attention has been given to the QoL of college students during their educational process. Attachment patterns have become an important aspect of health-related research in this regard, as they influence social functioning, coping, and psychological well-being (Mikulincer and Shaver 2016).

In terms of attachment style, secure attachment positively predicts QoL through positive cognitive-emotional processes, while insecure attachment style reduces QoL due to negative cognitive-emotional processes (Mikulincer and Shaver 2016). People with insecure attachment styles face more emotional and mental problems, leading to a lower QoL. Additionally, people's ideas, feelings, and behaviours when making decisions about their lives can be significantly influenced by their attachment type (Mikulincer and Shaver 2007).

Overall, understanding attachment theory, decision-making processes and styles, and quality of life can provide valuable insights into how individuals develop, make choices, and experience their lives. This study investigates the interaction of attachment and decision-making styles on the quality of life of university students.

Need and Significance of the study

Quality of life (QOL) refers to an individual's perception of their position in life within their cultural and value system. Attachment style, or an individual's characteristic way of relating to others, appears to play a key role in an individual's QOL. Specifically, research has shown that a secure attachment style positively predicts QOL through positive cognitive-emotional processes, while an insecure attachment style can reduce QOL through negative cognitive-emotional processes (Sutin *et al.* 2009).

Furthermore, attachment relationships established by emerging adults, such as college students, can significantly affect their career decisions and social self-efficacy. Previous studies have found that attachment relationships of college students directly impact both their career decisions and social self-efficacy (Tokar *et al.* 2003; Wolfe and Betz 2004). Given the importance of attachment style to QOL and the potential impact of attachment relationships on career and social outcomes, investigating the interaction of attachment and decision-making styles on the QOL of university students in a dominant multicultural society like that of Kerala is a significant area of research that can provide valuable insights into improving the well-being of individuals in this population.

Objectives

The present study aims to:

Investigate the association between attachment styles and decision-making styles among college students.
Analyse the interaction between attachment styles and decision-making styles on the quality of life of college students.

These objectives will help to provide a comprehensive understanding of how attachment styles and decision-making styles may impact the quality of life of college students.

Hypotheses

College students' attachment styles will be significantly associated with their decision-making styles.

The interaction between attachment styles and decision-making styles will significantly impact the quality of life of college students.

Method

Participants

A total of 180 undergraduate and postgraduate college students from Kerala, India participated in the study.

Variables

Attachment Styles

Attachment styles refer to the patterns of behavior and beliefs that individuals develop in their early childhood experiences with primary caregivers, such as parents (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2016). This study considered three attachment styles proposed by Collins and Read (1990) in their attachment theory:

Avoidant style: Individuals with an avoidant attachment style tend to feel discomfort with emotional closeness and intimacy in relationships, and may avoid or withdraw from emotional or physical closeness with their partners.

Secure style: Individuals with secure attachment have positive beliefs about themselves and others, and they feel comfortable with intimacy and closeness in relationships.

Anxious style: Individuals with an anxious attachment style may seek excessive reassurance and attention from their attachment figures and have a tendency to interpret ambiguous social cues as signs of rejection or neglect.

Decision-Making Styles

Decision-making styles refer to the individual's approach, reaction, and action when making decisions (Scott and Bruce 1995). This study considered five decision-making styles:

Intuitive: This style involves making decisions based on gut feelings, instincts, and intuition, without necessarily relying on rational analysis or objective criteria.

Dependent: This style involves seeking advice and guidance from others when making decisions, and relying heavily on the opinions and recommendations of others.

Rational: This style involves a logical and systematic approach to decision-making, where individuals carefully evaluate alternatives and make decisions based on objective criteria and rational analysis.

Avoidant: This style involves procrastinating and delaying decisions, or avoiding them altogether, often due to fear of making the wrong choice.

Spontaneous: This style involves making decisions impulsively and quickly, without necessarily considering all available alternatives or weighing the consequences.

Quality of Life

Quality of life refers to individuals' perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards, and concerns (World Health Organization, 1998).

Measure

The measures used in the present study were:

Adult Attachment Scale (AAS) The Adult Attachment Scale was developed by Collins and Read (1990), building on the earlier work of Hazen and Shaver (1987) and Levy and Davis (1988). The scale is characteristic of the prototypical descriptions (Hazen and Shaver, 1987) and converts into a series of 18 items on a 5-point Likert-type scale. It measures adult attachment styles named “Secure”, “Anxious”, and “Avoidant”.

General Decision-Making Scale (GDMS) The General Decision-Making Scale was developed by Scott and Bruce (1995). It consists of 25 items scored on a 5-point scale. The GDMS has subscales of “Rational”, “Avoidant”, “Dependent”, “Intuitive” and “Spontaneous”.

Quality of Life (QOL) Quality of Life was developed by Dubey, Dwivedi, and Verma (1932). It consists of 20 items scored on a 5-point scale, with a range of possible total score from 24 to 120. Higher scores indicate better quality of life, with an average score of 72 and above indicating better quality of life.

Statistical Techniques

The following statistical techniques were employed for analyzing the data:

Chi-Square test of association: The chi-square test for independence, also called Pearson’s chi-square test or the chi-square test of association, was used to determine if there exists an associative relationship between two categorical variables.

Two-way ANOVA: A two-way ANOVA (analysis of variance) was used to determine whether or not there is a statistically significant difference between the means of two or more independent groups that have been split on two variables.

Duncan post-hoc test: A significant F-ratio, obtained from ANOVA, indicates that we can reject the null hypothesis which states that the population means are equal. The significant F-ratio does not point out which of the groups differ in themselves. In such cases, the comparison of the differences between the means for any two groups is done using a rigorous post-hoc method called Duncan’s test. Duncan’s test was used in this study to determine the significance of differences among the groups indicated by ANOVA tests.

Procedure for data collection and analysis

Unrestricted self-selected survey method was employed to collect data from the participants. The scales were introduced one by one in the Google form, and the method of marking the responses was carefully explained. Participants were instructed to answer all the items and be honest in their responses. Confidentiality of the responses was assured, and participants were asked not to discuss their opinions or responses while responding. After checking for possible missing data, the data was consolidated and analysed using appropriate statistical measures.

Results and Discussion

Chi-Square Test for Association was conducted to determine the association between attachment styles and decision-making styles - the first hypothesis. Two-way ANOVA was conducted to study the interaction effect of attachment styles and decision-making styles on quality of life of college students – the second hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: College students’ attachment styles will be significantly associated with their decision-making styles (Table 1).

Of the 180 participants, 88 had rational decision-making styles, 39 had dependent styles, 28 had avoidant styles, 19 had spontaneous styles, and 6 had intuitive styles. Similar differences were observed

among attachment styles of the participants, with scores of 98, 42, and 40 obtained for avoidant, secure, and anxious styles, respectively. It can be observed from the table that most of the avoidantly attached participants have shown a preference for rational decision-making style. A detailed explanation can be obtained from table 2 showing the chi-square value computed for the same.

Cross-tabulation table of the attachment styles of the college students in terms of their decision-making styles

From table 1, a brief idea can be formed regarding the decision-making styles that are preferred by the college students with the different attachment styles. Though notable differences were also observed, it is not enough to state with assurance as to how significant the findings are; and only findings of significance can be generalised to the population. For this purpose, the data was subjected to the statistical technique of Pearson's Chi-squared test of association, and the results of the same are provided in table 2 below.

From Table 2 it can be seen that of the 180 participants in the study, Avoidant style of attachment was manifested by 98 (54.4%), while 42 (23.3%) participants were Securely attached and 40 (22.2%) were anxiously attached.

Of the 98 participants who were manifesting Avoidant attachment styles, only 1 used the intuitive decision-making style, while 9 were spontaneous, 14 were Avoidant, 17 dependent and with 57 participants, preferring Rational decision-making styles. In terms of percentage differentials, a clear preference was shown by the participants for the Rational decision-making style. It can be seen that 58.2% of the participants with Avoidant attachment style preferred it. intuitive decision-making style was by 1%, spontaneous style by 9.2 %, avoidant by 14.3% and dependent by 17.3% of the participants

From table 2, it can be observed that 42 of the 180 participants were Securely attached. Across the different decision-making styles, 18 participants contributing to 42.9% of the total who were securely attached showed preference for the Rational style of decision making, followed with the dependent style by 8 participants (19%), 7 (16.7%) each showing Avoidant and Spontaneous styles contributing to a total of 33.4%, while 2 (4.8%) participants had intuitive decision-making styles.

Of the 180 participants, only 40 were anxiously attached. This was the attachment style with the least number of participants, and 35% (14 no's) of the participants showed a preference for the dependent decision-making style. This was closely followed by the 32.5% (13 participants) with a preference for rational style, 17.5% (7 participants) with a preference for avoidant style and only 7.5% of the participants (3 no's) each preferring the Spontaneous and Intuitive styles.

Table 2 shows a significant association ($\chi^2=14.65^*$, $p<.05$) between attachment styles and decision-making styles among college students. The majority of avoidantly attached participants were found to have rational decision-making styles, with avoidant and secure participants more likely to be rational thinkers than those with an anxious attachment style. When considering the spread of participants across different decision-making styles, 6 participants (3.3%) adapted the Intuitive style, 39 (21.7%) were dependent, 88 (48.9%) were rational, 28 (15.6%) were avoidant, and 19 (10.6%) were spontaneous. These results suggest that attachment styles may impact decision-making processes among college students. Anxious individuals, who often seek intimacy and rely on others for emotional support, may struggle with making decisions on their own. Therefore, it is important to consider attachment styles when examining decision-making processes among college students. The cross-tabulation in Table 2 further supports these findings, highlighting the majority of avoidantly attached participants having a rational decision-making style, and a significant association found between attachment styles and decision-making styles among college students.

Hypothesis 2: The interaction between attachment styles and decision-making styles will significantly

impact the quality of life of college students.

In this study, a two-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the quality of life of college students based on their attachment styles and decision-making styles.

As seen in Table 3, a significant difference was observed in the decision-making style of the college students on their quality of life ($F=3.175$, $p<0.05$). However, no significant difference was found among the different attachment styles or decision-making styles, indicating that attachment style has no significant interaction with decision-making styles on the quality of life among college students.

Though interaction effect was not found, decision-making style significantly differed from one another on their quality of life and to ascertain the difference between the decision-making styles, the post hoc test - Duncan was conducted.

As shown in Table 4, intuitive, rational, and spontaneous were significantly differing from the participants with the dependent and avoidant decision-making styles in terms of their quality of life. The mean scores obtained for decision-making styles, namely intuitive, dependent, rational, avoidant, and spontaneous, were 71.50, 66.15, 74.34, 67.29, and 70.58, respectively. The results indicate that students with a rational decision-making style have a better quality of life compared to those with dependent, avoidant, spontaneous, and intuitive styles. In comparison, the students with intuitive and spontaneous attachment styles were also found to have a better quality of life than those with avoidant and dependent styles of attachment.

Conclusion

In summary, the study found a significant association between attachment styles and decision-making styles of college students. The results of the two-way ANOVA revealed no significant interaction between attachment styles and decision-making styles of college students on their quality of life. While avoidantly attached individuals have been associated with negative traits, this study did not specifically examine their quality of life. Further research is needed to understand the relationship between avoidant attachment and decision-making ability. Nonetheless, some evidence suggests that individuals with rational decision-making styles may be better equipped to make effective decisions in certain settings, such as those that require emotional restraint. Future research could explore the potential benefits of such decision-making styles for society.

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Tables

Table 1 - Representation of the General decision-making styles in terms of the Attachment styles of college students

		Attachment Styles			
		Avoidant	Secure	Anxious	Total
General Decision-Making Styles (GDMS)	Intuitive	1	2	3	6
	Dependent	17	8	14	39
	Rational	57	18	13	88
	Avoidant	14	7	7	28
	Spontaneous	9	7	3	19
	Total	98	42	40	180

Table 2 - Summary of the Pearson's chi-squared test of association. of attachment styles and decision-making among college students.

Attachment Styles		Avoidant	Secure	Anxious	Total participants within General Decision-making styles
General Decision making styles					
Intuitive	Participants	1	2	3	6
	Within Attachment	1.0 %	4.8 %	7.5 %	--
	Within Decision making	16.7 %	33.3 %	50.0 %	3.3 %
Dependent	Participants	17	8	14	39
	Within Attachment	17.3 %	19.0 %	35.0 %	--
	Within Decision making	43.6 %	20.5 %	35.9 %	21.7 %
Rational	Participants	57	18	13	88
	Within Attachment	58.2 %	42.9 %	32.5 %	--
	Within Decision making	64.8 %	20.5 %	14.8 %	48.9 %
Avoidant	Participants	14	7	7	28
	Within Attachment	14.3 %	16.7 %	17.5 %	--
	Within Decision making	50.0 %	25.0 %	25.0 %	15.6 %
Spontaneous	Participants	9	7	3	19
	Within Attachment	9.2 %	16.7 %	7.5 %	--
	Within Decision making	47.4 %	36.8 %	15.8 %	10.6 %
Total participants within Attachment		98	42	40	180
Percentage within Attachment		54.4 %	23.3 %	22.2 %	100 %
Pearson Chi Square Value		14.65*			

*Significant association between the groups

Table 3- Summary of the two-way ANOVA for QoL across different attachment and decision-making styles among college students.

Sl No	Independent variables	QOL
1	Attachment styles	0.140
2	Decision making styles	3.175*
3	AAS*GDMS	0.625

*significant at 0.05 levels

Table 4: Multiple Comparisons of Decision-Making Style Dimensions on College Students' Quality of Life.

Sl No	Decision making styles	N	Mean	1	2	3	4	5
1	Intuitive	6	71.50	()	*	--	*	--
2	Dependent	39	66.15		()	*	--	*
3	Rational	88	74.34			()	*	*
4	Avoidant	28	67.29				()	*
5	Spontaneous	19	70.58					()

*Significant difference between the groups