

# Attachment Styles in Female Adolescents: A Comparative Analysis of Girls in Alternative Care Settings and Traditional Homes



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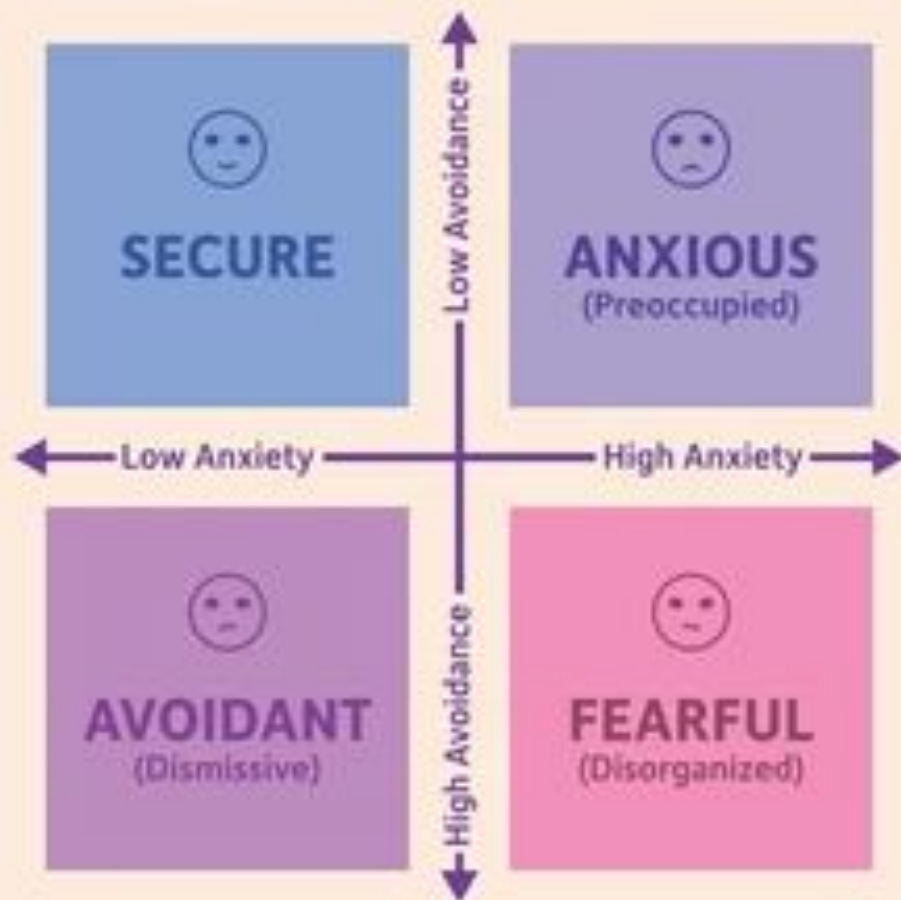
# Introduction

**Background** : The study is based in an orphanage, Maher Vatsalyadham Pune, India. The theory being investigated is Attachment Theory proposed by Bowlby and Ainsworth. The research aims to explore the relationship between attachment styles and psychological well-being, particularly comparing female adolescents in alternative care settings and traditional homes.

**Aim**: Investigate how attachment styles and social-emotional well-being differ between female adolescents in different caregiving environments.

**Research Gap** : This paper identifies a knowledge gap in understanding how attachment styles manifest differently among children in alternative care settings versus those in traditional family settings, and how these attachment styles impact their psychological well-being. Specifically, the gap pertains to the impact of the caregiving environment on the development of attachment and its implications for emotional well-being.

# ATTACHMENT STYLES



# Review of Literature

**Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth (1978):** Their research on attachment theory laid the foundation for understanding the role of early bonds with caregivers in shaping future relationships and emotional well-being.

**Levine (2010):** In his book "The New Science of Adult Attachment and How it Can Help You Find—and Keep—Love," Levine argues that early emotional bonds significantly influence future romantic relationships, including conflict resolution and expectations of intimacy.

**Divecha (2017):** Proposed that a secure attachment style develops when a child experiences consistent responsiveness, fostering trust, confidence, and a positive self-image.

# Review of Literature

**Mikulincer & Shaver (2016)** : Explored how anxious attachment stems from inconsistent caregiving, leading to emotional insecurity and trust issues.

**Brennan (2023)** : Identified the development of avoidant attachment in children whose parents fail to acknowledge their emotions, leading them to suppress their emotional needs and prioritize self-sufficiency.

**Thakkar, Mepukori, Henschel & Tran (2015)** : Found that children in alternative care settings tend to form stronger attachments with peers rather than caregivers, due to limited individual attention from caretakers in group settings.

**Sagone et al. (2023)** : Their research showed that adults with secure relationships had higher scores in psychological well-being compared to those without stable relationships.

# Methodology

This study aimed to explore the relationship between attachment styles and psychological well-being among teenage girls in alternative care settings compared to traditional family settings. The independent variable was the care setting (alternative care vs. traditional homes), and the dependent variables were attachment styles and psychological well-being.

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and an independent t-test. The t-test was chosen to determine if there were statistically significant differences between the two independent groups (experimental and control) on the subscales of attachment. This method allows for the comparison of means and identifies whether differences between groups are due to random chance or a real effect.

# Methodology

**Null Hypothesis:** There will be no significant correlational relationship between attachment styles and psychological well-being across different care settings.

**Alternative Hypothesis:** There will be a significant correlational relationship between attachment styles and psychological well-being.

**Sample :** 40 females aged 13-18, divided into a control group (20 participants living with parents) and an experimental group (20 participants from the Maher Vatsalyadham Orphanage, Pune).

**Data Collection Tools :** The Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ) with subscales of Availability, Anger-Distress, and Goal-Corrected Partnership was used. Responses were scored on a Likert scale.

**Data Analysis Tools :** The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and an independent t-test.

# Results

The results of the following subscales: Availability, Anger-Distress, Goal-corrected Partnership and the Overall Attachment Score

<b>Subscale</b>	<b>Experimental Group Mean (SD)</b>	<b>Control Group Mean (SD)</b>	<b>t(df)</b>	<b>p</b>
Anger-Distress	3.2 (1.77)	1.9 (2.55)	1.87	0.06
Availability	9.1 (1.45)	9.35 (2.23)	-0.42	0.67
Goal-Corrected Partnership	9.85 (1.09)	11.3 (1.26)	-3.89	<0.05
Overall Attachment Score	22.05 (2.74)	23 (3.63)	-0.93	0.35



# Discussion

1. **Anger-Distress:** The experimental group ( $M = 3.2$ ,  $SD = 1.77$ ) scored higher than the control group ( $M = 1.9$ ,  $SD = 2.55$ ) in this subscale, indicating more emotional reactivity in attachment-related situations. However, the difference was not statistically significant ( $p = 0.06$ ). This suggests that while the control group may exhibit slightly higher emotional distress in attachment-related scenarios, the effect size was not large enough to indicate a consistent, significant difference between the groups.
2. **Availability:** Both groups scored similarly, with the experimental group at  $M = 9.1$  and the control group at  $M = 9.35$ , resulting in no significant differences ( $p = 0.67$ ). This suggests that the girls in both environments perceived their caregivers (or significant others) as equally available, indicating that care setting did not heavily influence their perceptions of emotional availability.

# Discussion

3. Goal-Corrected Partnership: Significant differences were found between the experimental ( $M = 9.85$ ) and control groups ( $M = 11.3$ ) ( $p < 0.05$ ), with the control group showing a higher ability to form mature, balanced, two-way relationships. This finding implies that living in a traditional family setting fosters better development of goal-corrected partnerships, likely due to the stability and consistency of individual caregiving in those settings.

4. Overall Attachment Score: No significant differences were observed between the experimental ( $M = 22.05$ ) and control groups ( $M = 23$ ), with a p-value of 0.35. This indicates that, despite differences in specific subscales, the general attachment styles across both groups were similar, reinforcing the resilience and adaptability of attachment patterns regardless of caregiving conditions.

# Implications of the Study

The findings suggest that while certain aspects of attachment, such as the ability to maintain goal-corrected partnerships, are significantly affected by care setting, other aspects like perceptions of availability and overall attachment styles remain constant across both groups. This has important implications for psychologists, caregivers, and educators who work with children in alternative care. It shows that while children in orphanages may struggle with forming mature relationships, they are still capable of responding to and interacting with caregivers as available and resilient attachment patterns. Interventions aimed at improving relational maturity could greatly benefit children in alternative care settings, fostering healthier emotional and social development.

# Limitations of the Study

**Sample Size:** The study involved only 40 participants, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. A larger sample size would yield more data and increase the reliability of the results.

**Focus on Female Participants:** The study exclusively focused on females, which means the findings may not apply to males or other genders in alternative care. Future research could include a more diverse sample to understand the broader impact of care settings on attachment styles.

**Geographical Limitation:** The study was conducted at a single orphanage in Pune, India. Results may not be applicable to children in alternative care settings across different cultural or geographical contexts.

**Self-Reported Data:** The reliance on self-reported questionnaires may introduce response bias, as participants may not accurately reflect their true attachment experiences. A mixed-method approach incorporating interviews or caregiver observations would strengthen the findings.

# Rationale of the Study

The rationale behind this study was to explore a relatively under-researched area: how attachment styles differ between adolescents in alternative care settings and those in traditional homes. Given that early attachment patterns have long-term effects on emotional well-being and social relationships, understanding these differences is critical. The study sought to address the gap in literature by providing empirical data on how the caregiving environment influences attachment styles, with the ultimate goal of improving psychological interventions for children in alternative care.

# Conclusion

The study found that while the Goal-Corrected Partnership and Anger-Distress subscales showed differences between groups, the Availability subscale and Overall Attachment Score did not. This suggests that certain aspects of attachment, such as regulating anxiety and anger, may be impacted by alternative care settings, while other aspects, such as perceptions of availability, remain stable. This research provides valuable insights for psychologists and caregivers working with children in alternative care, though limitations such as the small sample size and focus on a single orphanage may affect the generalizability of the findings.

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