

Exploring Gender Differences in Attachment Styles within Married Couples

Sheikha Khalid Juma Al Shiidi, Humanities Department, Mazoon College

Al Wadha Moahmmad Salim Al Mandhariya, Humanities Department,
Mazoon College

Maryam Abdallah Al-Shirawi, Humanities Department, Mazoon College

Mazoon Sulaiman Ali Al-Maqbali, Humanities Department, Mazoon College

Faiza Mohammed Al-Hosni, Humanities Department, Mazoon College

Dr.Jameela Khatoon, Assisstant Professor, HumanitiesDepartment, Mazoon College

Abstract

The present study focuses on the gender differences in attachment styles among married couples in Oman. It aimed to examine the prevailing attachment style among couples in Oman and examine the relationship between different attachment style (Secure, Anxious-preoccupied, Avoidant-dismissive, Fearful Avoidant).The researchers in this study used a descriptive and quantitative research design. The sample consisted of 50 husbands and 50 wives, which was collected through non-probability sample design. Results were analyzed using different statistical techniques using both descriptive and inferential type done by PSPP. The results indicated that the Dismissive-Ambivalent attachment is the highest in terms of Mean among male and female, which is equal to (M=10.26), (SD =3.42) for female and (M=9.88), (SD =3.71) for male. The findings also indicated a significant difference in the Anxious-Preoccupied attachment style between genders, with males showing higher levels of this attachment style than females ($p = .044$), below the conventional threshold of .05). Through the understanding of attachment styles, it will help the couples to identify effective communication strategies and methods for resolving conflicts and problems that they face, which will contribute to the well-being of the family and thus society in general.

Key words: *Attachment - Attachment styles- Gender-Male& Female, Married couples.*

Married couples often navigate the complexities of their relationships through emotional bonds that are influenced by their attachment styles. Attachment theory, initially developed by psychologist John Bowlby, identifies how individuals form emotional connections based on their early experiences with caregivers. These attachment patterns—secure, anxious, avoidant, and disorganized—can play a significant role in how couples interact, communicate, and handle conflict. In marriage, understanding one's attachment style, as well as that of their partner, can foster deeper emotional intimacy, improve conflict resolution, and enhance overall relationship satisfaction. Attachment style refers to the patterns of behavior, emotional responses, and ways of relating to others that individuals develop, often based on their early relationships with caregivers. These patterns influence how people perceive and interact with others, particularly in close relationships like romantic partnerships.

By recognizing and addressing differing attachment styles, couples can build a stronger foundation of trust, empathy, and connection. Secure attachment, considered the healthiest, allows individuals to balance independence and intimacy (Bowlby, 1979). In contrast, anxious-preoccupied attachment is characterized by fear of abandonment and low self-esteem, while avoidant-dismissive attachment emphasizes independence and emotional detachment. Fearful avoidant attachment combines fear of closeness and rejection (Mcleod, 2024; Cherry, 2023).

Understanding these attachment styles is crucial for improving relationship among the couples ultimately leading to stronger relationships and healthier family dynamics. This study aims to examine the prevailing attachment styles among couples in Oman and gender differences in attachment patterns. The National Centre for Statistics and Information revealed, through its bulletin, an increase in divorce cases in 2022 in the Sultanate of Oman, as the percentage rose to 8% compared to 2021.

Different attachment styles do impact on the development of the child's personality. A child's attachment especially to their care givers has a significant impact on their emotional, social and cognitive growth, affecting their self-esteem, development of trust and other social cognition development.

Batool, (2017) revealed in her study that the reasons for divorce may be due to lack of communication and good dialogue, Attachment style also influences how individuals experience life and relate to others. These developed in early childhood and continues

as a pattern of behaviours throughout the life. Individual's attachment style has great impact on their relationship's satisfaction and overall well-being.

Research Objectives

- i. To identify the prevailing attachment styles among the married couples
- ii. To examine if there is any significant difference between the gender in attachment styles .

Research Hypotheses

H1: There are significant differences in attachment style due to the gender variable (male-female).

H0: There are no significant differences in attachment style due to the gender variable (male-female).

Review of Literature

Secure attachment is the emotional relationship that exists between a kid and his or her primary caregiver, who is generally the mother or father. It has been demonstrated to improve several facets of a child's development, including social skills, independence, and academic achievement (Novera and Setiawati, 2023). Allowing people to properly engage with their surroundings and finish things without giving up quickly. According to studies, they have greater attention and problem-solving capabilities (Assayyidah & Yoenanto, 2022).

For adults, stable attachment is defined as a strong, healthy emotional link with their caregivers that has a long-term influence on their mental and physical health. Understanding and encouraging stable attachment in adults can have a long-term influence on their well-being and relationships.

Those with anxious attachment styles may display particular behaviors in romantic relationships, such as desiring to communicate more and reply faster to signals from their partner (Dan et al., 2020). Research has found that patients with social anxiety disorder (SAD) had much greater degrees of anxious attachment and obsession than healthy people (Conrad et al., 2021).

Secure attachment style was positively correlated with marital satisfaction (Kamel Abbasi, A. et, al. 2016). Participants with insecure attachment styles had lower marital

satisfaction. (Kamel Abbasi, A. et, al. 2016)-as regards gender comparisons, there were significant differences in avoidance, with males showing higher scores than females. (González-Ortega, E. et, al. 2021)

Environ, J. (2024) aimed to investigate the mediating role of failures in mentalizing in the relationships between attachment styles and PSMU. This study involved 3600 volunteers aged 18–60 years old. Participants completed various assessments, including attachment styles, mentalization, and PSMU measures. According to the results, secure and dismissing attachment styles were associated with lower PSMU, while preoccupied and fearful attachment styles were associated with higher PSMU.

Methodology

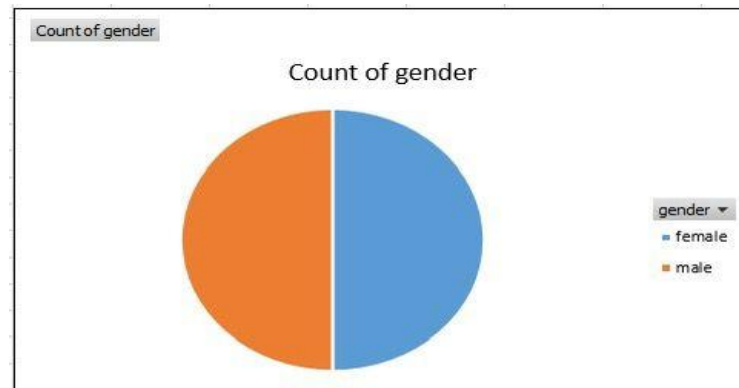
The research used a quantitative and descriptive approach to examine attachment styles and gender differences among the married couples. The quantitative method involved collecting numerical data on these variables and analysing it through statistical calculations, with results represented in tables and graphs. The descriptive method was used to interpret and explain the theoretical models related to attachment styles. The sample consisted of 100 married individuals, equally divided between men and women, aged 20 to 59, selected through non-probability sampling. Data were collected using a self-report questionnaire divided into three sections: demographic information and questions about attachment styles. The Attachment Styles Questionnaire (ASQ) was used with 16 items rated on a 4-point scale rating.

For data analysis, both descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Descriptive statistics included measures of central tendency such as mean, median, and mode, and data were displayed in tables and charts. Inferential statistics involved t-test to assess the gender differences in different attachment styles.

Result and discussion

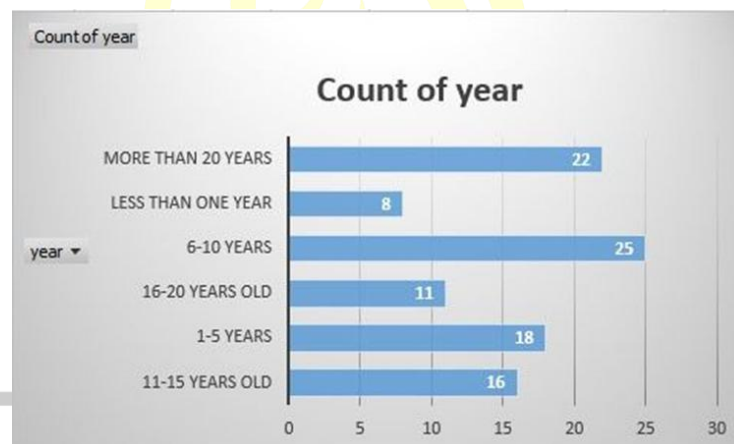
The findings of the result have been depicted in the form of tables and figure. PSPP software was used to analyse the data.

Figure1: Representing the number of genders



The above Figure -1, reflect the number of male and female participants which were 50 each, making a sample of 100.

Figure 2: Representing the responses on the duration of marriage among males and females



The above Figure 2 refers to the percentage of responses on the duration of marriage among male and female participants. The maximum responses of 25% was found to be for the duration 6-10 years of marriage, while 22% of responded to be married for the duration of marriage for more than 20 years. Also, 18% of the married respondents had been married for 1-5 years. Moreover, the percentage of respondents who were married for 11-15 years reached 16%, and from 16-20 the responds reach 11%. The lowest response rate was 8%, whose marriage duration was less than one year.

Table1: Representing the descriptive values for the distribution of attachment styles between males and females

Group Statistics				
Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation-	S.E. Mean
Anxious_Preocc male	50	4.20	3.70	.52
female	50	2.84	2.92	.41
Fearful_Avoidant male	50	6.28	3.55	.50
female	50	5.70	3.11	.44
Secure_attachment male	50	8.06	3.19	.45
female	50	7.00	2.69	.38
Dismissive_Amb male	50	9.88	3.71	.52
female	50	10.26	3.42	.48

Table 1 indicates the Descriptive Table for each 4 types of attachment style (Anxious-Preoccupied attachment, Fearful-Avoidant attachment, Secure attachment, Dismissive-Ambivalent attachment) and related to the gender. Through the first objective of the study, which stipulates knowing the prevailing attachment pattern among couples in the Sultanate of Oman, the researchers found through the results that the Dismissive-Ambivalent attachment is the highest in terms of mean score among male and female, which is equal to (M=10.26), (SD =3.42) for female and (M=9.88), (SD =3.71) for male. Those individuals with Dismissive-Ambivalent attachment style often seek independence and self-sufficiency, avoiding personal connections and attachment. They consider themselves immune to the emotions involved with close ties and desire less intimacy with them. Anxiety suppression and emotional detachment are coping techniques for hiding feelings and avoiding rejection (Del Giudice, 2011).

As it supported the results of another study conducted in America that was entitled Adult romantic attachment: Theoretical developments, emerging trends, and unanswered questions In Psychological Inquiry, showed that the dominant attachment style in adults is Dismissive-Ambivalent attachment style, with a score of (M= 3.42) for females and (M=3.38) for males.

Table2: T-test for Distribution of attachment styles between males and females

Independent Samples Test									
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-Test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Anxious_Preocc Equal variances assumed	3.04	.085	2.04	98.00	.044	1.36	.67	.04	2.68
			2.04	92.99	.044	1.36	.67	.04	2.68
Fearful_Avoidar Equal variances assumed	1.30	.256	.87	98.00	.387	.58	.67	-.75	1.91
			.87	96.34	.387	.58	.67	-.75	1.91
Secure_attachrr Equal variances assumed	.08	.781	1.80	98.00	.075	1.06	.59	-.11	2.23
			1.80	95.25	.076	1.06	.59	-.11	2.23
Dismissive_Amb Equal variances assumed	.01	.930	-.53	98.00	.596	-.38	.71	-1.80	1.04
			-.53	97.35	.596	-.38	.71	-1.80	1.04

In the table 2 t-test analysis the t-test analysis in Table 2 reveals the following findings for comparing attachment styles between males and females:

- **Anxious-Preoccupied Attachment:** The Independent Samples t-test indicated significant difference between males and females in this attachment style ($p = .044$). The mean difference suggests that males ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 3.70$) have slightly higher levels of anxious-preoccupied attachment compared to females ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 2.92$), with the mean difference ($M = 1.36$) being at the edge of significance.
- **Fearful-Avoidant Attachment:** There was no significant difference between genders in fearful-avoidant attachment as per the t-test that does not assume equal variances ($p = .387$). The mean scores for males ($M = 6.28$, $SD = 3.55$) and females ($M = 5.70$, $SD = 3.11$) suggest minimal difference in this attachment style.
- **Secure Attachment:** For secure attachment, the t-test showed no significant difference between males and females ($p = .075$). The mean score for males ($M = 8.06$, $SD = 3.19$) is slightly higher than for females ($M = 7.00$, $SD = 2.69$), although the difference is not statistically significant.

- **Dismissive-Ambivalent Attachment:** The t-test for Dismissive-Ambivalent attachment also did not show a significant difference between genders ($p = .596$). The mean scores were higher for females ($M = 10.26$, $SD = 3.42$) compared to males ($M = 9.88$, $SD = 3.71$), but this difference was not significant.

A significant gender difference was detected in the Anxious-Preoccupied attachment style, with the test yielding a significance level just below .05. This indicates a meaningful difference between males and females, with females exhibiting higher levels of Anxious-Preoccupied attachment than males. It supported a study entitled Gender Differences in Attachment Styles Using Slovak Version of the Experiences in Close Relationships –Revised (ECR-R) results of our current research, where the statistically significant difference in the Anxious-Preoccupied attachment style, where females showed, scored significantly higher on Anxious scale ($p = 0.006$) (Gugová, R,2011).

For the other attachment styles, no significant gender differences were detected:

- **Fearful-Avoidant Attachment:** The significance value was $p = .387$, indicating no significant gender difference.
- **Secure Attachment:** The significance value was $p = .075$, also indicating no significant gender difference.
- **Dismissive-Ambivalent Attachment:** The significance value was $p = .596$, again indicating no significant gender difference.

In terms of Fearful-Avoidant, Secure, and Dismissive-Ambivalent attachment styles, the tests did not reveal any significant differences between genders; the significance values were well above the .05 level, implying that males and females are similar in these attachment styles (Fraley and Bonanno,2004).

These results can be discussed in the context of the research questions and hypotheses stated earlier in the research study. For instance, the hypothesis H1 stating that there are significant differences in attachment style due to the gender variable is supported for Anxious Preoccupied only.

4.2: Discussions

According to the first objective of the research, which is to know the prevailing style among married adults in the Sultanate of Oman between both genders, it was found that

Dismissive-Ambivalent attachment style is the prevailing style through the results of the researchers in this study, as it supported the results of another study conducted in America that was entitled Adult romantic attachment: Theoretical developments , emerging trends, and unanswered questions In Psychological Inquiry, its results showed that the dominant attachment style in adults is Dismissive-Ambivalent attachment style, with a score of (M= 3.42) for females and (M=3.38) for males. This type of attachment needs for independence m to be an attempt to completely escape attachment for people who have. They see themselves as independent and impervious to the emotions that come with having strong relationships. They typically contest the necessity of intimate relationships. It is not unexpected that they desire less closeness from their attachments, whom they frequently see less favorably than they do. When it comes to possible sources of rejection (their relationships or attachments), people with a dismissive-ambivalent attachment style typically keep their feelings to themselves. The two most common coping mechanisms are emotional detachment and anxiety suppression.

In response to the research questions and hypotheses, the study concluded:

- The Dismissive-Ambivalent attachment style prevails among adult couples in the Sultanate of Oman.
- Significant gender differences were found only in the Anxious-Preoccupied attachment style, with females showing higher levels than males.

In the research there was a noticeable difference in gender concerning attachment styles, which was particularly obvious in the Anxious Preoccupied attachment style and in this case, females were displaying high levels compared to males. This result agrees with other studies that have revealed the existence of gender discrepancies with respect to emotional devotion and anxieties about closeness (Del Giudice, 2019). On the other hand, none of the other attachment styles differentiated based on the gender variable, reflecting the phenomenon of these styles being expressed similarly across genders in the context of Omani culture.

SUGGESTIONS

The study explored the relationship between different attachment styles—Anxious-Preoccupied, Fearful-Avoidant, Secure, and Dismissive-Ambivalent, aiming to help couples better understand their attachment styles to improve communication, resolve

conflicts, and enhance marital satisfaction. The sample consisted of 100 married adults, equally divided between men and women.

The findings revealed that the Dismissive-Ambivalent attachment style was the most common among Omani couples. Significant gender differences were found in the Anxious-Preoccupied attachment style, with women showing higher levels than men. The study's limitations included a small sample size that restricts the ability to generalize the results to the broader population. The reliance on self-reported data also raised concerns about accuracy and potential bias. Participants recruited through social media might not represent the diversity of Omani society. Additionally, misunderstandings of survey questions by some participants may have affected the accuracy of the results.

To improve future research, the study suggests expanding the sample size and ensuring a more representative distribution across different regions of Oman. Conducting surveys in paper form might also reduce potential bias from online responses. Educating young people about Secure attachment styles and guiding parents on fostering healthy attachments with their children could help build stronger and healthier marital relationships in society.

References

- Bowlby J. Attachment and loss: Retrospect and prospect. *Am J Orthopsychiatry*. 1982;52(4):664-678. doi:10.1111/j.1939-0025.1982.tb01456.x
<https://www.simplypsychology.org/attachment.html>
- Conrad, R., Forstner, A. J., Chung, M. L., Mücke, M., Geiser, F., Schumacher, J., & Carnehl, F. (2021). Significance of anger suppression and preoccupied attachment in social anxiety disorder: a cross-sectional study. *BMC Psychiatry*.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-021-03098-1>
- Dan, O., Zreik, G., & Raz, S. (2020). The relationship between individuals with fearful-avoidant adult attachment orientation and early neural responses to emotional content: An event-related potentials (ERPs) study. *Neuropsychology*.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/neu0000600>.

Del Giudice, M. (2011) Sex Differences in Romantic Attachment: A Meta-Analysis.

Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 37, 193-214.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0146167210392789>

Fraley, R. & Bonanno, George. (2004). Attachment and Loss: A Test of Three Competing Models on the Association between Attachment-Related Avoidance and Adaptation to Bereavement. Personality & social psychology bulletin. 30. 878-90.

<https://intapi.sciendo.com/pdf/10.1515/atd-2015-0061>

Gugová, R. Gabriela & Heretik, Anton. (2011). Gender Differences in Attachment Styles Using Slovak Version of the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) Gabriela Rozvadsky Gugova-Anton Heretik. Acta Technologica Dubnica. 1.

34-41. <https://intapi.sciendo.com/pdf/10.1515/atd-2015-0043>

Kamel Abbasi AR, Tabatabaei SM, Aghamohammadiyan Sharbaf H, Karshki H. (2016). Relationship of Attachment Styles and Emotional Intelligence with Marital Satisfaction. Iran J Psychiatry Behav;10(3): e2778. doi: 10.17795/ijpbs-2778.

McLeod, S. (2024). Attachment theory. *Simply Psychology*. Retrieved from

<https://www.simplypsychology.org/attachment.htm>