



The role of abandonment schema in the relationship between attachment styles and couple satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to investigate the role of abandonment schema in the relationship between attachment styles and couple satisfaction. The design of the research is descriptive, cross-sectional and correlational. A total of 120 people participated, aged between 19 and 55 years, $M = 25.67$, $AS = 8.95$, 23 men and 97 women. Only people involved in a romantic relationship of at least six months participated. Data measurement was carried out using the questionnaire, made out of the Abandonment subscale of The Cognitive Style Questionnaire YSQ-S3, the Couple Satisfaction Index and the Attachment Style Questionnaire Short Form. The statistical results revealed the first hypothesis to be partially true, showing that secure attachment is positively associated with couple satisfaction. Regarding the second hypothesis, it was found to be partially true as well, as abandonment schema only mediates the relationships between anxious attachment and couple satisfaction and between dependent attachment and couple satisfaction. The results of the study are consistent with other research in the scientific literature and contribute to the completion of knowledge on the subject under investigation. Thus, it is proposed more future research on the subject in question.

Keywords: *abandonment, attachment styles, couple satisfaction*

1. INTRODUCTION

Most people experience suffering through social relationships. Therefore, it is natural for individuals' central fears to revolve around rejection, abandonment, and

loneliness. Fear of abandonment, developed through various experiences, interferes with inner peace and can correlate with multifaceted disruptions in mental health and

negative social behaviors (O'Hara et al., 2021). Fear of abandonment is the root of numerous negative emotions and has severe implications on personality structure. It creates a state of insecurity, anxiety, and restlessness, developing a form of dependency and a continuous need for assurance that one will not be abandoned. Additionally, this internal distress has global implications for individuals, often manifesting in various types of somatization.

Recent studies in developmental psychology indicate the importance of a secure environment in achieving a healthy intrapsychic life. In the United States, abandonment trauma is a central trauma, accounting for 9.2% of a sample of individuals with psychiatric problems who have experienced psychological traumas (Kira et al., 2013). The results of a study comparing children with a deceased parent and children with separated or divorced parents indicate the same significantly high percentage of suicide in adult life for both groups (Adam., 1973). Therefore, the feeling of abandonment has serious implications in how an individual perceives the internal and external world.

Given the close connection between satisfaction in a relationship and overall life satisfaction, we aim to examine the dynamics of individual and dyadic life issues (Dyrdal et al., 2010). The abandonment schema, associated with suffering in both dimensions, may play a possible mediating role between attachment styles and perceived couple satisfaction. Attachment styles provide a framework for understanding an individual's behavior and affect dynamics within a couple. The styles include anxious, dependent, avoidant, and secure. Studies in the literature indicate significant implications of attachment styles on couple satisfaction. Levy and Davis (1988) highlighted the influence of attachment styles on satisfaction within a romantic relationship. Secure attachment is associated with positive relationship characteristics, while avoidant attachment indicates less satisfying relationships. Additionally, anxious-ambivalent attachment correlates negatively with positive relationship characteristics. Hammond & Fletcher (1991) highlight the positive correlation between relational satisfaction and secure attachment, and the negative correlation between relational satisfaction and avoidant or anxious attachment.

Attachment Styles

Attachment styles are formed in childhood based on personal history and experiences, and they are characteristic of the parent-child relationship. Attachment theory refers to the child's adaptive response to the parental model of love. An individual's model consists of internal representations of self and others that start developing from early childhood. Over time, empirical experiences lead to cognitive generalization, encompassing expectations and perspectives regarding the inner and outer world (Collins, 1996). Bowlby (1973) argued that people tend to generalize

their working models to new relationships. The person incorporates the working models, which are preserved and applied in their subsequent romantic life. They organize cognitions, influence behaviors, and guide reactions to suffering. Main et al. (1985) argue that internal working models direct memory, attention, thinking, affect, and behavior. A child's attachment to their primary caregiver is linked to various factors such as social competence, self-esteem, professional development, and life satisfaction. In late adolescence, attachment to the primary caregiver decreases in intensity and frequency. However, there is still a considerable influence of interaction patterns between parents and children on how individuals relate to others (Bowlby, 1969/1982).

According to Bowlby's model (1973), children with a secure attachment style are more likely to become self-reliant, having the ability to seek appropriate help when needed. In the literature, it has been observed that individuals with a secure attachment style are more likely to be involved in a serious relationship, become dedicated and supportive parents, have fewer depressive symptoms, and adopt adaptive coping behaviors in stressful situations (Fraley & Roisman, 2019). The secure attachment style develops based on a healthy relationship with the caregiver, where the child has learned to trust others because they received the trust and emotional support they needed during childhood.

Ainsworth et al. (1978) defined three categories of attachment types: secure, anxious-resistant or ambivalent, and avoidant. Feeney et al. (1994) proposed a measurement scale with multiple subscales: confident, uncomfortable with closeness, preoccupied with relationships, discomfort with closeness, placing relationships on a secondary level, need for approval, preoccupation, avoidant attachment, and anxious attachment. In the present study, four attachment styles are being investigated: secure, dependent, anxious, and avoidant.

Individuals with high levels of anxious attachment tend to hyperactivate the attachment system: they are overly sensitive to signs of rejection or acceptance. They direct a significant amount of their energy toward the relational dimension, overinterpreting social cues. Individuals with high levels of avoidant attachment function by deactivating the attachment system: they feel less comfortable getting close to others, evading openness and relational closeness (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). People can score high levels in both anxious and avoidant attachment, exhibiting attitudes from both response categories.

Another problematic direction is the intergenerational continuity of an unhealthy attachment style. A significant number of individuals with an insecure attachment style have failed to establish a secure bond with their own children. However, there are also numerous parents who

have broken the generational cycle, providing an affectionate and protective environment. Younger parents were more prone to adopting an insecure attachment style compared to older parents. Distancing from childhood experiences and relationships with parents are supportive factors (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Main et al., 1985).

Relationship Satisfaction

Satisfaction represents the state of happiness compared to unhappiness, taking into account all aspects of the environment, situation, person, or object being evaluated (Collard, 2006). Individuals in a romantic relationship self-assess the quality of their relationship through a subjective process that varies among individuals. What may be satisfying for one person may be dissatisfying for another.

Bowlby (1969/1982) describes romantic life as one of the highest values, essential for healthy functioning. It represents an immense and important dimension of life. The relationship with a partner is an intimate environment where the self can express vulnerability. In the literature, relationship satisfaction is defined as a state of being content with experiences, interactions, and expectations within a romantic life, where satisfaction focuses on interactions with the partner (Ward et al., 2009). Perceived satisfaction with the romantic relationship is closely related to overall life satisfaction (Dyrdal et al., 2010).

Among the studied factors that influence relationship satisfaction are: the importance of communication skills (Eğeci & Gençöz, 2006), self-trust and trust in the partner (Erol & Orth, 2014). Thus, unresolved individual psychological or personality issues have negative effects on the couple's relationship. Hunsley et al. (1995) argue that marital success is based on the extent to which both partners in the relationship are satisfied with the fulfillment of expectations and needs mutually. Additionally, the level of acceptance of a partner's inability to meet all of the other's expectations is an important factor in determining the quality of a relationship.

It is expected that high satisfaction in a couple indicates a stable, long-term relationship. A satisfying relationship is an indicator of a healthy environment in which future children can develop harmoniously. On the other hand, low satisfaction in a relationship indicates instability and a short-lived relationship.

The abandonment schema

The fear of abandonment is described as a tension between attachment and separation. It does not significantly differ between genders and age groups (Wolchik et al., 2002). Close related to the fear of loneliness, Salerno (2003) says it is a normal fear in a capitalist society that emphasizes individual work. However, the fear of abandonment represents a facet of maladaptive cognitive schemas, causing inner tension and dependence on others.

Abandonment schemas form early, starting in childhood. One essential factor for the optimal functioning, well-being, and harmonious development of a child is a healthy dependency on a trustworthy, sensitive, and responsive parental figure, as postulated in Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1998). Numerous studies analyze this relationship and support the theory, particularly emphasizing the significance of the maternal figure. Additionally, during childhood and adolescence, various adverse events can amplify the feeling of abandonment, such as the departure of the father figure, placement in foster care, frequent changes in caregivers (Kira et al., 2013).

The negative relationships with the attachment figure strongly affects feelings and self-confidence in oneself and the world. The spectrum of abandonment, indifference, and emotional rejection by the maternal figure has been associated with internalized shame (Claesson & Sohlberg, 2002). Shame is an emotion of significance in self-esteem and the internalization of one's own image, with considerable effects on the individual's subsequent social life. Gilbert (2000) considered shame as a defensive response, typically submissive behavior in a social evolutionary context, closely linked to social anxiety. In other studies, shame is associated with aggressive behaviors or conflict avoidance, external blame, low empathic and collaborative skills (Lopez et al., 1997; Tangney, 1995).

Anxiety plays an important role in the paradigm of the fear of abandonment. Among the first emotions experienced by a child is anxiety. Separation anxiety has been studied in the field of developmental psychology, representing the child's first fear of abandonment. In clinical cases of generalized anxiety disorder, one of the primary factors is the fear of abandonment (Hare & Levis, 1981).

The sense of belonging has significant implications for emotional paradigms and cognitive processes. The need-to-belong hypothesis suggests that humans have a need to form and maintain a minimum number of relevant and positive relationships. Failure to fulfill the need for belonging constitutes a severe deprivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). From an evolutionary perspective, humans have always been social beings. Thus, the desire for belongingness has represented an adaptive factor. Social exclusion has practical and affective implications, but the response to it varies among individuals. People often adopt behaviors aimed at being accepted, and if these attempts fail, the individual may engage in a variety of maladaptive behaviors (DeWall & Richman, 2011).

In the context of divorce, the fear of abandonment is stimulated both in children and adults during the adjustment period. Wolchik et al. (2002) investigated the fear of abandonment as a mediator between parental divorce stressors and internalization of problems. Both the mother and the child had high scores in internalization, detrimental to the parent-child relationship. One of the child's internal

representations consisted of the negative consequences of parental conflict on their family life and parental affection dynamics, leading to the fear of no longer being loved (O'Hara et al., 2021). The trauma of separation for a child can have equally powerful effects as the death of a parent when an attachment figure is removed. A study compared the incidence and type of suicidal ideation between three groups: those with a deceased parent, those with separated parents, and the control group. Results indicated a suicide attempt rate of 16% for both experimental groups and 4% for the control group (Adam, 1973). Regarding adults experiencing divorce, Spanier and Casto (1979) found that most individuals relied on social support from family and friends. In the absence of this support, people found it more difficult to adjust their lifestyle and emotional life.

The betrayal trauma theory suggests that an emotionally dependent person who is harmed by an abuser will experience a sense of betrayal. Abandonment falls under the umbrella of emotional abuse, accessing the dimension of this theory. The loved one betrays through the lack of love and, furthermore, the harm caused. Emotional involvement increases the importance of the relationship and its effects. Thus, the feeling of betrayal, conditioned over time, is expected to be part of subsequent mechanisms or adjacent symptoms of the individual (Freyd et al., 2007). According to the betrayal trauma theory, victims, perpetrators, and witnesses may not assume their role in the unfolding trauma to maintain their social or institutional relationships (Freyd et al., 2007). This explains why there are individuals with the abandonment schema activated who are not consciously aware of the harmful relationship in question.

The stages of coping theory suggest that an individual may go through the following stages after social exclusion: reflexive, reflective, and resignation (Williams, 2009). The reflexive stage involves immediate pain after rejection. The reflective stage occurs after the individual has had time to think about the rejection and engages in a response. Williams (2009) argues that the type of response depends on the individual's threatened need for control, self-esteem, belongingness, or meaning of existence. According to the stages of coping theory, the individual must react prosocially to satisfy the needs for self-esteem and belongingness and aggressively or antisocially to satisfy the needs for control and sense of existence. The resignation stage consists of the individual concluding that their value is not appreciated after unsuccessful attempts in the reflective stage. The individual integrates this experience with other negative experiences from the past, leading to learned helplessness, low self-worth, and neurotic symptoms. People tend to lose motivation for engaging in prosocial behaviors, while motivation for aggressive behaviors may increase (DeWall & Richman, 2011). Claesson & Sohlberg (2002) state that individuals with emotionally unsatisfied needs by their

mother are more likely to exhibit responses such as lack of communication and social isolation rather than aggressive behaviors.

Responses to social exclusion do not depend so much on the context in which it occurs but rather on the painful internal tension. Therefore, in the literature, it is highlighted that individuals who experience rejection in online environments have similar responses to those who experience direct rejection (Zadro et al., 2004). Additionally, Eisenberger et al. (2003) demonstrate that accidental exclusion activates the same neural regions in the victim as intentional exclusion. Gonsalkorale & Williams (2007) assert that a person's needs are invalidated to the same extent whether they are excluded by a member outside the social group or by a valued member of the social group.

Therefore, abandonment can lead to multiple threats to the individual.

Relationships between attachment styles and couples satisfaction

Through the working model described by Bowlby (1969), which individuals internalize in childhood in their relationships with parents, attachment styles are formed with subsequent implications in their couple's life. Hazan and Shaver (1987) conceptualized the romantic dimension as a process through the attachment. The attachment theory explains how healthy and unhealthy forms of romantic relationships have their origins in early social experiences.

Relationship satisfaction is associated with secure attachment and negatively correlated with avoidant (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Hammond & Fletcher, 1991). Leak & Cooney (2001) identified a positive association between high levels of authenticity and self-determination in relationships with a secure attachment style, and a negative correlation with anxious, dependent, and avoidant attachment styles. Simpson (1990) demonstrated in a longitudinal study that individuals with a secure attachment style exhibited higher levels of relational independence, commitment, and satisfaction compared to those with anxious or avoidant attachment styles.

Thus, it is theorized that individuals who have developed a secure attachment style in their family relationships become adults with a greater capacity for managing relationships. A healthy intrapersonal profile favors the dynamics of a healthy romantic relationship, as the person is able to realistically self-evaluate expectations and communicate authentically, leading to satisfaction in the involved couple.

Taking into account the aforementioned, our primary objective is to analyze the relationship between attachment styles and satisfaction in couple relationships, formulating the following hypotheses:

H1: *Attachment styles are significant predictors of couple satisfaction.*

H1a: *Secure attachment is a significant positive predictor of couple satisfaction.*

H1b: *Avoidant attachment is a significant negative predictor of couple satisfaction.*

H1c: *Anxious attachment is a significant negative predictor of couple satisfaction.*

H1d: *Dependent attachment is a significant negative predictor of couple satisfaction.*

Relationships between abandonment schemas, attachment styles, and satisfaction in couple relationships

Fear of abandonment and attachment styles are factors within the dynamic model formed in the first significant affective relationship with attachment figures. The model takes shape in the early years of life and can undergo modifications over time. While entering a romantic relationship, individuals tend to project the learned model onto their partner. The layered theory of attachment is supported by numerous studies in the literature, such as the 15 studies in the meta-analysis conducted by Karantzas et al. (2022). The research found a positive correlation between maladaptive cognitive schemas and insecure attachment styles, and a negative correlation with secure attachment style. Maladaptive cognitive schemas correlated more significantly with anxious styles, followed by avoidant and fearful styles.

Insecure attachments develop starting in childhood, when individuals are exposed to emotionally unavailable figures. Feeney and Noller (1990) conducted a study investigating attachment types and their potential implications. Based on the study results, individuals with a secure attachment reported relatively positive perceptions of early family relationships. Individuals with an avoidant attachment were more likely to experience separation from their mother and distrust in others. Avoidant individuals were the least likely to perceive their father as a supportive figure they could rely on. Individuals with an anxious-ambivalent attachment exhibited a lack of independence and a desire for deep commitment in relationships. Certain key elements are more likely to influence the development of maladaptive cognitive schemas. Unsatisfied needs in childhood lead to a variety of maladaptive cognitive schemas defined in cognitive schema therapy, including fear of abandonment, negative self-perception, and personal manifestations in response to suffering (Simard et al., 2011). As a coping mechanism for the lack of responsiveness from the parental figure, the child may respond with either hyperactivation or deactivation of attachment needs (Cassidy & Berlin, 1994).

The central goal of hyperactivation is to obtain the support and protection that is lacking from the parental figure. In contrast, deactivation aims at detachment and

emotional distance, relying on one's own resources (Dandurand & Lafontaine, 2013). Fear of abandonment, along with other tense emotions, can develop in response to emotional unavailability from one of the parental figures.

Chambless and Goldstein (1980) highlighted in the literature that adverse experiences in the past involving physical or psychological loss of a significant person have led to excessive dependence on others as an attempt to avoid abandonment and preserve feelings of self-worth, security, and identity. The central fear can branch out into other fears such as fear of criticism, rejection, and failure. As a result of developing these fears, individuals lose self-efficacy, constructing their responses based on the approval of others and the possibility of failure. This externally oriented self-modeling is exhausting and causes more anxiety (Heide & Borkovec, 1984).

Bowlby's attachment theory (1973, 1982) supports the notion that parents' responsiveness to children's attachment signals and their availability in stressful situations provide children with a secure base upon which they organize their expectations about the world and help them cope with distress. Children with available parents react to separation with less fear, hostility, and avoidance than those with unavailable parents (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

Clackson and Sohlberg (2002) highlighted the implications of developing a strong sense of shame due to abandonment and unmet emotional needs by the mother figure. A person who experiences a high level of shame tends to perceive significant others in their life with rejection and neglect. Through early experiences of abandonment, this becomes a pattern. People expect the love and affection model offered by parents in childhood to be repeated in a similar manner in adult life.

Bowlby's attachment theory (1973, 1982) suggests that fear of abandonment by one of the parental figures leads to a high level of anxiety. As a form of threat used in child discipline, 27% of 700 parents in a study reported conditioning the child's undesirable behavior with abandonment or other forms of leaving (Bowlby, 1973). The child receives the message that they are replaceable, unimportant, and dispensable. These feelings, reinforced, accompany them into adulthood. Through Bowlby's working model described as internalized by individuals in childhood relationships with parents, attachment styles are formed with subsequent implications in couple relationships.

Taking into account the above, the second objective of this study aims to investigate how couple life is affected and influenced by an established attachment style, mediating the relationship through fear of abandonment. Therefore, we formulate the following hypothesis H2: *Abandonment schema mediates the relationship between attachment styles and couple satisfaction.*

2. METHODOLOGY

Participants and procedure

A total of 120 individuals participated in this study, ranging in age from 19 to 55 years old, $M = 25.67$, $SD = 8.95$, including 23 males (19%) and 97 females (81%). Regarding marital status, 105 participants were in a relationship (87%), and 15 were married (13%). As for the duration of the relationship, 29 participants reported a duration between six months and one year (24%), 35 reported a duration between one and three years (29%), 24 reported a duration between three and five years (20%), and 32 reported a duration over five years (27%).

The inclusion criterion for participating in the study was that participants be Romanian citizens, at least 18 years old, and in a relationship for a minimum of six months. Convenience sampling was used as the sampling method. Out of a total of 150 individuals invited to participate in the study, only 120 agreed to participate and completed the questionnaire (80%). The distribution and completion of the questionnaire took place online, on social media platforms. After a brief introduction to the study, participants were invited to access and complete an online platform containing the questionnaire. Participants were not rewarded in any way for taking part in the study.

The research ethics conditions regarding data processing and interpretation, as well as data security monitoring, were met. The data were initially organized in encrypted Excel tables accessible only to the author of this study. Participants' names or any other data that could link their identity to the provided data were not requested.

Instruments

Socio-demographic variables were assessed through a list of questions with multiple-choice or open-ended options, which investigated age, gender, marital status, and length of the relationship.

The abandonment schema was measured using the abandonment dimension questions from The Cognitive

Style Questionnaire YSQ-S3 (Young, 2003). The instrument consists of 113 items, however 5 items from the abandonment subscale were used. Responses are given on a 6-point Likert scale, where 1 = totally untrue and 5 = it describes me perfectly. Scores are obtained by summing up the scores for each item. A study examined the validity of the questionnaire translated into Romanian, resulting in a very good Cronbach's α coefficient ranging from .68 to .96 (Trip, 2006).

Couple satisfaction was measured using The Couples Satisfaction Index (Funk & Rogge, 2007). The questionnaire version with 16 items was used. The items are scored on a Likert scale from 1 - extremely unhappy to 7 - perfect. The next 9 items measure responses on a six-point Likert scale, from 0 - always disagree to 5 - always agree. The following 6 items measure responses on a six-point Likert scale, from 0 - not at all to 5 - extremely. Scores are obtained by summing up the scores for each item.

Attachment styles were measured using the Attachment Style Questionnaire Short Form (Feeney et al., 1994). The instrument consists of 15 items that measure various subscales, including secure, avoidant, anxious, and dependent attachment. Responses are provided on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 - disagree and 5 - agree. Scores are obtained by calculating the arithmetic mean of each dimension..

Study design and data analysis

The present study has a cross-sectional, descriptive, and correlational design. The statistical analysis program IBM.SPSS.24 (IBM Corp, 2016) and the Jamovi medmod module (The jamovi project, 2022) were used to organize the data and test the hypotheses.

3. RESULTS

Descriptive statistics

It is observed (see Table 1) that the scores obtained by participants for abandonment are low, $M = 13.10$, $SD = 6.03$. Regarding attachment styles, the scores are as follows: for secure attachment, $M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.70$; for avoidant attachment, $M = 1.60$, $SD = 0.57$; for anxious attachment, $M = 2.38$, $SD = 1.02$; and for dependent attachment, $M = 2.89$, $SD = 0.82$. Couple satisfaction has relatively high scores, $M = 66.10$, $SD = 12.64$. Furthermore, significant negative

correlations are observed between avoidant attachment and secure attachment, $r = -.28$, $p < .01$. Abandonment correlates significantly positively with anxious attachment, $r = .63$, $p < .01$, and with dependent attachment, $r = .39$, $p < .01$. Couple satisfaction correlates significantly positively with secure attachment, $r = .27$, $p < .01$, but it has significant negative correlations with abandonment, $r = -.25$, $p < .01$, and avoidant attachment, $r = -.24$, $p < .01$.

Skewness and kurtosis are within the range of (-1, 1), indicating a normal distribution of the data. There were no missing cases, and no cases were excluded from any of the statistical analyses.

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics*

	M	AS	α	Ab	ATSE	ADEV	ATAX	ATDE	SC
Ab	13,10	6,03	.83	1					
ATSE	3,67	,70	.71	-,02	1				
ADEV	1,60	,57	.42	,11	-,28**	1			
ATAX	2,38	1,02	.87	,63**	-,19*	,19*	1		
ATDE	2,89	,82	.49	,39**	,16	,02	,42**	1	
SC	66,10	12,64	.93	-,25**	,27**	-,24**	-,14	-,08	1

** . $p < .01$, * . $p < .05$.

Ab – Abandonment schema, ATSE – Secure attachment, ADEV – Avoidant attachment, ATAX – Anxious attachment, ATDE – Dependent attachment, SC – Couple satisfaction

Hypotheses testing

H1: *Attachment styles are significant predictors of couple satisfaction.*

H1a: *Secure attachment is a significant positive predictor of couple satisfaction.*

H1b: *Avoidant attachment is a significant negative predictor of couple satisfaction.*

H1c: *Anxious attachment is a significant negative predictor of couple satisfaction.*

H1d: *Dependent attachment is a significant negative predictor of couple satisfaction.*

To test this hypothesis, a multiple regression analysis was performed with the four attachment styles as predictors and couple satisfaction as the dependent variable.

Table 2. *Multiple regression analysis for attachment styles as predictors of couple satisfaction*

	B	ES	β		
ATSE	4,27	1,74	,24	2,46	,02
ATVE	-3,62	2,04	-,16	-1,78	,08
ATAX	-,15	1,26	-,01	-,12	,91
ATDE	-1,73	1,54	-,11	-1,12	,26

$R^2 = .11$

It can be observed that the four attachment styles account for 11% of the variance in couple satisfaction, and the regression equation is statistically significant, $F(4, 115) = 3.63$, $p < .01$. Among the four predictors, only secure attachment is significantly positively associated with couple satisfaction, $\beta = .24$, $t(120) = 2.46$, $p < .05$.

Considering this result, we can say that hypothesis H1 is only partially supported by the analyzed data.

H2: *Abandonment schema mediates the relationship between attachment styles and couple satisfaction.*

To test this hypothesis, four mediation analyses were conducted, with the four attachment styles as predictors, couple satisfaction as the dependent variable, and the abandonment schema as the mediating variable.

Table 3. Mediation analysis for abandonment schema in the relationship between secure attachment and couple satisfaction

Effect	Label	Estimation	ES	95% CI		Z	p	% Mediation
				Min.	Max.			
Indirect	a × b	.12	.40	-.66	.89	.30	.77	3.65
Direct	c	3.12	1.51	.16	6.08	2.07	.04	96.35
Total	c + a × b	3.24	1.56	.18	6.29	2.08	.04	100.00

The abandonment schema does not mediate the relationship between secure attachment and couple satisfaction, $b = .12$, $CI_{95\%}(-.66, .89)$, $Z = .30$, $p = .77$.

Table 4. Mediation analysis for abandonment schema in the relationship between avoidant attachment and couple satisfaction

Effect	Label	Estimation	ES	95% CI		Z	p	%Mediation
				Min.	Max.			
Indirect	a × b	-.61	.44	-1.48	.26	-1.37	.17	12.17
Direct	c	-4.41	1.64	-7.62	-1.20	-2.69	.01	87.83
Total	c + a × b	-5.02	1.66	-8.28	-1.76	-3.02	.00	100.00

The abandonment schema does not mediate the relationship between secure attachment and couple satisfaction, $b = -.61$, $CI_{95\%}(-1.48, .26)$, $Z = -1.37$, $p = .17$.

Based on these results, we can say that H2 is not supported by the analyzed data.

Table 5. Mediation analysis for abandonment schema in the relationship between anxious attachment and couple satisfaction

Effect	Label	Estimation	ES	95% CI		Z	p	% Mediation
				Min.	Max.			
Indirect	a × b	-1.94	.85	-3.61	-.28	-2.29	.02	90.04
Direct	c	.22	1.35	-2.44	2.87	.16	.87	9.96
Total	c + a × b	-1.73	1.11	-3.90	.44	-1.56	.12	100.00

The abandonment schema mediates the relationship between anxious attachment and couple satisfaction, $b = -1.94$, $CI_{95\%}(-3.61, -.28)$, $Z = -2.29$, $p < .05$.

Table 6. Path analysis for abandonment schema in the relationship between anxious attachment and couple satisfaction

			Label	Estimation	ES	95% CI		Z	p
						Min.	Max.		
Anxious attachment	→	Abandonment	a	3.52	.43	2.69	4.36	8.26	.00
Abandonment	→	Couple satisfaction	b	-.55	.23	-1.01	-.10	-2.38	.02
Anxious attachment	→	Couple satisfaction	c	.22	1.35	-2.44	2.87	.16	.87

Anxious attachment is positively associated with the abandonment schema, $b = 3.52$, $CI_{95\%}(2.69, 4.36)$, $z = 8.26$, $p < .01$. Additionally, the abandonment schema is negatively associated with couple satisfaction, $b = -.55$,

$CI_{95\%}(-1.01, -.10)$, $z = .38$, $p < .05$. There is no significant direct relationship between anxious attachment and couple satisfaction, which shows a total mediation.

Table 7. Mediation analysis for abandonment schema in the relationship between dependent attachment and couple satisfaction

Effect	Label	Estimation	SE	95% CI		Z	p	% Mediation
				Min.	Max.			
Indirect	$a \times b$	-1.43	.59	-2.59	-.27	-2.41	.02	61.95
Direct	c	.88	1.34	-1.75	3.50	.66	.51	38.05
Total	$c + a \times b$	-.55	1.29	-3.08	1.98	-.43	.67	100.00

The abandonment schema mediates the relationship between dependent attachment and couple satisfaction, $b = -1.43$, $CI_{95\%}(-2.59, -.27)$, $Z = -2.41$, $p < .05$.

Table 8. Path analysis for abandonment schema in the relationship between dependent attachment and couple satisfaction

			Label	Estimation	ES	95% CI		Z	p
						Min.	Max.		
Dependent attachment	→	Abandonment	a	2.48	.57	1.35	3.60	4.32	< .00
Abandonment	→	Couple satisfaction	b	-.58	.20	-.97	-.19	-2.91	.00
Dependent attachment	→	Couple satisfaction	c	.88	1.34	-1.75	3.50	.66	.51

Dependent attachment is positively associated with the abandonment schema, $b = 2.48$, $CI_{95\%}(1.35, 3.60)$, $z = 4.32$, $p < .01$. Additionally, the abandonment schema is negatively associated with couple satisfaction, $b = -.58$, $CI_{95\%}(-.97, -.19)$, $z = -2.91$, $p < .01$. However, in terms of the relationship between dependent attachment and couple satisfaction, there is no significant association, $b = .88$, $CI_{95\%}(-1.75, 3.50)$, $z = .66$, $p > .05$.

Taking into account these results, we can say that H2 is partially supported by the analyzed data, in the sense that the abandonment schema only mediates the relationships between anxious attachment and relationship satisfaction, as well as between dependent attachment and relationship satisfaction.

4. DISCUSSION

In the present study, two objectives were proposed. The first objective was to analyze the relationship between attachment styles and relationship satisfaction. The second objective was to explore the mediating role of the abandonment schema in the relationship between attachment styles and relationship satisfaction. In the descriptive statistical analysis of the data, it is observed that the largest number of participants falls into the secure attachment style, followed by the dependent style, the anxious style, with the avoidant style being the least represented. Regarding abandonment, relatively low scores were observed. At the level of relationship satisfaction, relatively high scores were recorded. Thus, from the descriptive analysis of the data, it can be interpreted that the majority of participants do not face the analyzed problems, and there is a link between factors associated with a healthy psychological lifestyle. Therefore, it can be affirmed that the sample largely corresponds to the population, with most participants falling into the secure attachment category (Mickelson et al., 1997).

Based on the first objective of the study, which focused on the relationship between attachment styles and relationship satisfaction, the hypothesis was formulated and tested in the inferential statistics of the data. The hypothesis, along with the secondary hypotheses that assumed the predictive nature of attachment for relationship satisfaction, were partially supported. Among the tested predictors, only secure attachment style was found to be significantly positively associated with relationship satisfaction. One possible reason for finding this effect could be that most participants fell into the category of high scores on these two factors, while the other hypotheses were not supported due to the small number of participants. Leak & Cooney (2001) observed an association between relational management qualities and secure attachment. Hazan and Shaver (1987) showed that individuals with a secure attachment style are involved in happier relationships than those with an insecure attachment style. Additionally, Simpson (1990) described the correlation between secure attachment and interpersonal skills that promote higher levels of satisfaction in romantic relationships. Therefore, based on the results obtained from the statistical analysis, we can conclude that the first hypothesis is partially supported and in line with other research on the topic of interest.

Regarding the second objective of the present study, the role of the abandonment schema in mediating the relationship between attachment styles and relationship satisfaction was analyzed. In terms of the second objective, the second hypothesis, which assumed the mediation of the mentioned relationship, was partially supported, as the abandonment schema was found to mediate the relationships between anxious attachment and relationship

satisfaction, as well as between dependent attachment and relationship satisfaction. Thus, a significant mediation of the abandonment schema is observed, demonstrating its significant implication in the two captured relationships between anxious and dependent attachment styles with relationship satisfaction. The results are consistent with other research in the literature that associates childhood adversity, including feelings of abandonment, with insecure attachment styles (Mickelson et al., 1997), and the latter are closely related to a lack of relationship satisfaction (Feenely, 1994). Chambless and Goldstein (1980) explain the sequence of psychological loss of a significant person followed by the development of general insecurity, which leads to anxious or dependent attachment. The results associated with the second hypothesis demonstrate it is partially true and is supported by previous research.

Theoretical and practical implications

The present study contributes to the scientific literature focused on attachment styles, specifically in relation to couple life. The study aims for increasing awareness for the consequences of an unhealthy environment, drawing attention to behaviors that do not favour an harmonious development for children and the possible consequences in adulthood, particularly in couple relationships.

Considering that the abandonment schema mediates the relationships between anxious attachment and relationship satisfaction, as well as between dependent attachment and relationship satisfaction, it is recommended to implement measures to reduce the chances of developing these attachment styles and abandonment, along with the negative emotions associated with it.

For attachment styles, it is proposed to implement free projects to inform and educate future parents about the numerous effects of parental behavior on child development.

Regarding child abandonment, it is encouraged to maintain and improve existing programs, such as the adoption process. Additionally, counseling sessions should be provided for the mental well-being of children in foster care and improvements should be made in the conditions of these centers. In terms of the negative emotions generated by family abandonment, free psychological counseling sessions should be offered to children whose parents are going through a divorce, are working abroad, or are part of a single-parent family due to various reasons.

The practical implications of the study relate to mobilizing programs of information, counseling, and improvement for vulnerable situations involving children, with a focus on prevention.

Limitations and future research directions

One of the limitations of this study is the small number of participants, predominantly students. In future research, a larger and more diverse sample in terms of age and backgrounds will be considered.

Another relevant limitation in capturing the effect could be the inclusion criterion of being in a relationship for a minimum of 6 months. It should be considered that abandonment and insecure attachment styles may lead to a profile with a high level of social incapacity, characterized by an inability to find or maintain a romantic relationship. Therefore, the effect may not be captured in individuals who fail to engage in a relationship. It is proposed that future studies include participants who are not in a relationship in order to make comparisons.

A third limitation that may influence the validity of the results is the measurement method of the variables. Participants self-evaluated the measured components. It is possible that participants provide responses that do not correspond to reality, leading to erroneous data. Motivation could be represented by creating a profile they want others to perceive or an inability for realistic self-evaluation.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this research aimed to analyze the relationship between attachment styles and relationship

satisfaction, with the mediating role of the abandonment schema. The focus on this topic is justified by the significant role of the parent in a child's life and the major influence they have, highlighting the subsequent effects on adult development. The fear of abandonment is investigated as a mediator in the relationship between attachment style formed over the years and how it affects overall satisfaction in the romantic sphere of life. The study examines the link between factors in individual life and factors in couple life. Thus, a research with multiple hypotheses analyzed statistically was conducted. We consider that the results of the study are partially supported. The first objective was partially demonstrated, as only the relationship between secure attachment style and relationship satisfaction was supported among the proposed hypotheses. As for the second objective, the mediating role of the abandonment schema between anxious and dependent attachment styles and relationship satisfaction was concluded. Given the critical importance of attachment and the fear of abandonment, it is crucial to identify, understand, and address these schemas in order to promote healthy emotional development and well-being. Further research is proposed on how cognitive schemas affect key factors in the dimension of couples.

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