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**Experience of Childhood Bereavement and Current  
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## **Experience of Childhood Bereavement and Current Attachment Style**

**Dr Sadia Aleem**

Assistant Professor, Department of Behavioral Sciences, Fatima Jinnah Women University

Email: [sadia.aleem@fjwu.edu.pk](mailto:sadia.aleem@fjwu.edu.pk)

### **Abstract**

**Purpose:** Previous research supports the idea that attachment style is closely associated to experience of bereavement, but the research investigating current attachment style and childhood experience of bereavement is lacking. This study aims to explore how experience of bereavement in childhood relates to current attachment style in adulthood and to utilize attachment theory in understanding the experience of bereavement during childhood.

**Methodology:** Mixed method design was used to address the research objectives. This study was based on qualitative interview and a quantitative questionnaire. Twenty-four students from University of Bedfordshire were employed through purposive sampling to conduct semi-structured interviews. Experience in Close Relationships (ECR) questionnaire was used for quantitative assessment.

**Findings:** The results of thematic analysis showed people with various attachment styles offered various accounts of their bereavement experience as children. This study offered proof that this was the case.

**Recommendations:** It is suggested that this research can help us understand how children experience bereavement by illustrating how attachment theory might be used. This study may aid mental health practitioners in identifying some practical methods for assisting grieving individuals. The parent-child attachment bond approach among bereaved families may involve the appropriate bereavement counsellors and professionals. Bereavement experience during childhood links to adulthood attachment style. This study will contribute in developing the understanding of bereavement in children with attachment theory perspective.

**Keywords:** *Attachment, child bereavement, adult attachment style*

**INTRODUCTION**

Attachment theory emphasizes on importance of relationships from cradle to grave (Bowlby, 1980). Lifelong needs for safety and security develop attachment towards a few special persons in individuals’ lives. Child-primary care taker’s relationship has a great influence on child/s reaction to experience of bereavement (Bowlby, 1988); (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). Research indicates that bereavement style in adulthood is closely associated to the attachment style in childhood (Walter, 1994). Significance of interpersonal relationships towards the reaction to bereavement is an important discussion in attachment theory (Stroebe & Schut, 2005).

Attachment theory is a framework to understand interpersonal relationship by indicating that child and primary caregiver relationship is the basic relationship of human beings (Bowlby, 1977), that influences human psychological wellbeing throughout the lifespan. Research has proven the continuity of same attachment style of 62 % infants to primary caregiver up to 12 and 18 months age (Vaughn, Egeland, & Sroufe, 1979). In other studies, the same findings have been reported to the 4 and 6 years old (O’Connor & Rutter, 2000). Some of the findings indicate that western children continue with the same attachment pattern through the life span Kobak, Rosenthal, and Serwick (2005).

Securely attached children are more flexible and open in reshaping their internal working models, as they confidently willing to explore the external world. However, insecurely attached children are rigid and inflexible in developing internal working models because of their initial negative experience (Bowlby, 1988). Internal working model developed by child of self and significant others is because of positive and negative experience of the self and others (Bowlby, 1969) that activates across the life and provide a base to future relationships (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999). Moreover, internal working model of self and significant other (positive or negative) has been developed by the child while experiencing positivity and negativity of the self and others in life events (Bowlby, 1969).

**Table 1: Internal working model (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991)**

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Positive others			
Positive self	Secure	Preoccupied	Negative Self
	Dismissing	Fearful	
Negative others			

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Table 2 indicates attachment styles evolution during the past few decades.

**Table 2: Attachment styles development overtime**

Child-Primary Caregiver Attachment Styles		Adult Attachment Styles	
Ainsworth (1978)	Main & Solomon (1990)	Hazan & Shaver (1987)	Bartholomew (1990)
Secure	Disorganized-Insecure Attachment	Secure	Secure
Anxious-Ambivalent		Anxious	Pre-Occupied
Avoidant		Ambivalent	Dismissing
		Avoidant	Fearful

### **Bereavement and Attachment**

Significant loss of someone important, job, physical ability, or any other incidents that cause anger, sadness or relief is termed as bereavement (Salters-Pedneault, 2010). Childhood bereavement is the most distressing experience, children may return back to normal routine within short span of time or suffer longer (Bonnano & Kaltman, 2001). According to attachment research there is a close association between parent/primary caregiver and the child bonding and the child's reaction to loss (Bowlby, 1988; Bretherton & Munholland, 1999).

Insecurely attached individuals show complications while going through grieving process, research says attachment and bereavement styles particularly in continuing bond and coping up, are closely related to each other (Bowlby, 1980; Stroebe & Schut, 2005). Attachment research shows that attachment system has been activated when bereaved children show mental representation of attachment figure while dealing with significant loss process (Bowlby & Parkes, 1970; Stroebe, Schut, & Stroebe, 2005). Bereaved children resolve the grief of death when caregivers are responsive and self is important (Bowlby et al., 1970). However, they cannot resolve the grief when they experience unavailability of caregivers and self as vulnerable (Stroebe, 2002).

Parental care depends on the care they have experienced being children from their own parents (Edelstein et al., 2004; Hesse & Main, 2006). While secure parents are responsive and emotionally close to the children, avoidant parents ignore the children, resulting the suppression of feelings and then vulnerably to distress. Research shows the child of an avoidant parent experience less response while going through stress (Edelstein et al., 2004) and goes through separation anxiety and parenting distress (Moreira et al., 2015). Parents with unresolved loss history dissociate the distressing experience in their mental representation of the deceased (Main and Hesse (1990) are suppressed to unconscious level (Bowlby, 1980). This shows significant confusions in their acceptance of others as dead or alive (Hesse & van Ijzendoorn, 1999; Main et al., 1990). They develop maladaptive mechanism of coping by adapting both avoidant and anxious attachment styles.

Research says that individuals with anxiously attached attachment experience complicated grief and helpless to balance the thoughts and feelings related to deceased (Mancini & Bonanno, 2012). Moreover, avoidant attached individuals are able to avoid and cop up with painful memory and develop a delayed grief (Bonanno & Field, 2001). Research indicates that people who are insecurely attached have difficulty in coping up with bereavement (Field, 2006). Psycho-emotional

reactions including anxiety, depression, guilt, anger, fear, pity and vulnerability are closely associated with bereavement experience particularly the death of a significant other including parent, sibling and friend (Thompson et al., 1998). Many patients indicating psychological distress report the loss of the sibling during childhood in retrospective studies (Pollock, 1962).

Depression and anxiety are more common psychological symptoms in adults with insecure attachment style (Buelow, McClain, & McIntosh, 1996). Anxious and fearful attachment individuals are more vulnerable towards psychological disorder particularly post-traumatic disorder as compare to secure and dismissing attachment individuals (Mikulincer, Horesh, Eilati, & Kotler, 1999). Moreover, securely attached easily find social support to cope up the distress as compare to insecurely attached (Schmidt, Nachtigall, Wuethrich-Martone, & Strauss, 2002). Secure and avoidant attached adults can easily divert their focus from the distressing events and positively move towards coping while anxious adults are more at risk because of their negative thinking of upsetting event and coping (Schmidt et al., 2002).

### **Problem Statement**

Previous studies mentioned above indicate a link between parent child attachment and level of childhood experience with significant loss. However, research on current attachment style and childhood bereavement association is lacking. Studies support that child–parent relationship continues to be emotionally very important in adulthood (Scharlach, 1987). However, adults’ sample has been more widely studied in past studies. The research on childhood bereavement is lacking (Wilkins & Woodgate, 2005). The reason is that children are considered to be less affected by death experience because of lack of awareness while recent studies discussed that (Oltjenbruns, 2001). Research shows that children’s understanding of death becomes mature when they are above ten years old and they know the irreversibility, permanence and unavoidability Willis (2002).

Research focus on adults’ bereavement however research on children and adolescents is very rare (Kandt, 1994). Among studies that discuss child bereavement discuss with reference of parental loss while sibling loss has been ignored (Sood, Razdan, Weller, & Weller, 2006). Further long-term effects of bereavement have been ignored as well. Consequently, there are very limited support services for the bereaved children (Kirwin & Harnrin, 2005). In the current study, we anticipate using an attachment theory perspective to investigate loss in childhood. This study explores how childhood experience of bereavement is recalled and reported under the impact of current attachment style. Thematic analysis in current interview based qualitative study aims to address following interlinked questions:

Have childhood bereavement experiences been recalled and reported differently by individuals with different attachment styles? What are these differences? Qualitative method was appropriate in addressing a retrospective account, recalling experience of bereavement and generating a rich data. This study aimed to consider the subjective experience recalled and reported by the participants rather than what had happened in reality.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Research Design and Participants**

University students were employed as sample for a semi-structured interview, who had been classified in respective attachment style by completing the questionnaire Experiences in Close

Relationships (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000) and categorized as secure, preoccupied, dismissing and fearful attachment styles. Thematic analysis was applied on data.

Twenty-four university students were selected for current study who had been gone through the experience of a significant death of a close one during childhood, including, parent, grandparent, sibling, friend or any other close relation. Age limit was 19 and above. Participants were between 7 and 16 years old, at the time of death while between 21 and 43 years now. Meantime was 18.4 years. 13 were postgraduates while 11 were undergrads. Fifteen were non-British while 9 were British. They were enrolled in different disciplines such as Psychology, Social Work, Business, Biomedical Sciences, Information Systems, International Human Resources Management, Computer Networking, Sports Therapy, Criminology, and Midwifery. Ethnicity included, White, Black African, Indian, Pakistani and other Asians. 13 were married and 11 were in relationship. ECR scores classified six under each attachment style.

### **Research Instruments**

#### *Experience in Close Relationships Questionnaire*

Standardized questionnaire, Experience in Close Relationships Questionnaire (ECR; Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000), was used for data collection. Attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety in adults had been measured on 36 items in the questionnaire. Odd items in sequence with nine reverse keys and even items with one reverse key measured avoidance and anxiety respectively. Score ranged from 18-126 with 72 as borderline. Secure adults scored below 72 in both avoidance and anxiety and fearful scored above 72 in both. Those who scored higher in anxiety and lower in avoidance were classified as preoccupied while lower in anxiety and higher in avoidance were dismissing.

Research (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) indicated that 7-point Likert scale had been used to assess the intimate relationship when 7 stands for strongly agree and 1 for strongly disagree. The participants had been asked to complete the information about the most recent partner when they had no partner currently. They scored 72-126 while 72 was midpoint and showed higher or lower anxiety and avoidance in individuals. Research further showed that higher score in avoidance and anxiety subscales indicated higher attachment anxiety and higher attachment avoidance (Brennan et al. 1998). Furthermore researchers (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000) indicated a dimensional approach to adult attachment. There were three-dimensional adult attachment styles in early research (Simpson, 1990; Collins & Read, 1990) however Brennan et al. (1998) proposed new terms as attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance.

ECR-R is most reliable and valid measure for the assessment of attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety (Fraley et al., 2000). In current study, participants were categorized in attachment styles, including secure, preoccupied, dismissing and fearful attachment style, on the basis of their filled questionnaires.

#### *A semi structured interview*

This interview was about to recalling the childhood experiences of bereavement showing thoughts, behavior and feelings at the time of loss, any support from acquaintances and change in feelings overtime. The main aim was not to report actual events but how these events were recalled and reported in relation to loss. Interview was based on twenty-five open ended questions to get the information about the experience of bereavement, feelings and reaction. Qualitative semi-

structured interview allowed the participants to share the childhood bereavement experience openly, and flexibly, providing a chance to explore different themes and codes. A semi-structure interview is effective, flexible and diverse method to describe current responses and past experiences of the participants more effectively than a questionnaire (Fylan, 2005),

### **Procedures**

Fellow students and friends around the university campus had been personally approached and explained the nature of study. After enquiring about the vulnerability and agreeing upon the research participation, informed consent had been taken and debrief form had been provided. After completing the questionnaire, participants were asked to participate in interview. This was a thirty minutes interview in a pre-booked room to avoid interferences and disturbances and to make participants more relax and comfortable. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Respect, autonomy, confidentiality, anonymity, vulnerability, and diversity in cultures of the participants had been dealt with a great caution and according to BPS ethics code. Important documents including informed consent, demographic sheet and the debrief form had been provided to avoid any methodological and ethical issues. The relevant literature had been considered, for example, Stroebe et al. (2003) for the benefits and limitations of using quantitative and qualitative methods in researching with the bereaved.

### **Data Analysis**

According to Boyatzis (1998) thematic analysis is appropriate method in qualitative data analysis in identifying themes in participants. He aided in his work about the three phases in thematic analysis. Such as sampling coding and validation. Further, it is a flexible and useful qualitative method in psychology and other disciplines (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is applicable both in theory-driven and data-driven research (Holloway et al., 2003). In current study thematic analysis has been conducted in two steps:

In first stage, recognition of best themes, creating transcripts out of recorded interview as Riessman (1993) reported. Bird, (2005) indicated that it's a long and tiresome procedure. In this stage, Transcripts has been created against the recordings with the help of professionals to avoid language barriers. To minimize biasness this process has been conducted without knowing the participants' attachment style. In second stage, the narratives regarding the past experiences and current situation including friends and family, their reaction and support, description of the dead closer one, had been coded using thematic analysis and inductive approach. Thematic analysis is more than just transcribing speech to words rather it is a process of hunting the core meaning of those words (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). This process was completed in two phases.

#### ***Phase 1***

First phase of analysis is presented in tables 3–5. In this phase very detailed “codes” has been identified that describe the Self and the significant Other who was lost in relation to significant attachment issues, emotional needs, support provision, and loss. Attachment research studies show that representations of self and other are attachment representations. According to Bartholomew et al. (1991), a model of individual differences in adult attachment style is based on individuals' internal model of the self and that of other (positive or negative). In the current study descriptions came either directly from the participant's talk about self and other or indirectly, out of the narration of an event in which the self appears to be sad. During analysis in Phase 1, notes of all

such descriptions were created at the margins of each interview transcript. About 34 codes have been identified corresponding to different descriptions of the Self at the time of the loss (table 3).

**Table 3: Codes describing the Self around the time of bereavement, according to attachment style**

Descriptions of the Self	Frequency of Occurrence			
	Secure	Preoccupied	Dismissing	Fearful
Sad	6	6	6	6
Shocked	3	5	3	3
Lonely	4	2	5	3
Fearful	2	1	1	1
Guilty	1	0	1	0
Angry	3	0	0	1
Suppressing grief	2	2	3	1
Tearful	2	2	5	4
Declining in school performance	1	3	1	2
Seeking	2	1	0	2
Dreaming	0	1	0	1
Having psychological problems	1	1	1	1
Insecure	0	0	1	0
Having little understanding of death	1	1	0	0
Having a sense of disappearance	0	1	0	0
Having late realization of loss	1	2	0	1
Getting ill	0	0	1	0
Disappointing	1	1	0	0
Avoiding to talk	1	0	2	3
Regularly visiting grave	0	0	1	0
Stopped eating	0	0	1	1
Getting mature	0	0	2	0
Turning to deceased in bad times	0	2	0	0
Couldn't cry	0	1	1	0
Pitiful	0	1	0	1
Empty/vague	0	2	0	0
Disbelieving	0	1	0	3
Feeling bad	0	1	0	0
Feeling headache	0	1	0	0
Smoking	0	1	0	0
Blessing in church	0	1	0	0
Turning within self	0	1	0	1
Self is separating from deceased	0	0	0	1
Hurting	0	2	0	1
Confusing	0	1	0	0

Quotes and descriptions are presented to illustrate some codes for the Self below.



### ***Tearful***

This code evolved from instances in which participants were in tears when they heard or thought about the loss. “I can’t remember anything else apart from that I was crying so much that I hadn’t noticed that everybody else had left the lecture theatre...some children would kind of climb over me to leave the theatre. The next thing I remember was a member of staff was coming up to me because I was sitting and crying and, then, I realized that I was the only child left.” (Participant 1, p.2)

### ***Suppressing grief***

This code referred to accounts of participants reporting how they had to hide feelings of grief. “In those days I think we were not expressive in our feelings you know – I don’t remember real grief. We were kind of being a tearful and a bit quiet. We were waiting to go to our home. We were protecting ourselves from others because our auntie said we should be strong enough for our mum. I remember her to say come on, be strong for your mum. When she come home the key thing is that we repress our feelings”. (Participant 12, p.2)

### ***Disbelieving***

This code indicated participant’s childhood feelings of disbelief regarding the loss. “When I was told it was like my heart stopped, it was, I couldn’t believe it. I just could not believe it because he wasn’t ill. He was a sort of mid-seventies so wasn’t that old and he was a fit man. You know he used to go for walks. He used to go for fishing; he used to go for all sorts... He did skiing, you know in Norway, a very healthy life style. He always worked with his hands you know, he had been a baker, and he loved his gardening. He was a fit happy person. He wasn’t overweight, nothing.” (Participant 14, p.2)

### ***Couldn’t cry***

This code described participant’s accounts in which feelings were so strong that participants could not cry. “It’s interesting because for one week I was so disappointed so I can’t cry and your tears are not enough to express.” (Participant 3, p.2)

### ***Little understanding of death***

This code evolved from participant’s difficulty to understand what happened, to realize the loss. “Oh, I gave my dad a hug and went outside to play. Really, it wasn’t like, I said I really didn’t understand the meaning, I didn’t understand I wasn’t going to see him anymore.” (Participant 9, p.2)

### ***Lonely***

This code derived from accounts of loneliness relating to the death of the loved one. “I can’t explain too much, I was sad, very sad. I liked to stay alone. I wanted to be alone but you know people used to come to support me”. (Participant, 13, p.3). In addition, feelings the participant holds about the deceased today were identified and classified in 35 codes as contracts between the Self then and the Self now were often made in the transcripts (table 4).

**Table 4: Codes describing the current self-according to attachment style**

Themes	Frequency of occurrence			
	Secure	Preoccupied	Dismissing	Fearful
Missing	6	6	6	6
Remembering	6	6	6	6
Feeling happy with memory	6	3	4	3
Having change in sadness	4	3	4	1
Same feelings	2	2	2	4
Still talking about	2	3	5	3
Having patience	1	1	0	0
Dreaming	1	4	0	0
Fear of getting close to others	0	1	1	2
Wishing the deceased to be alive	0	2	1	2
Still crying	1	0	2	0
Feeling sorry	1	0	1	1
Keeping things as memorial	1	1	1	0
Controlled	1	1	1	0
Strong	3	2	1	0
Visiting grave	1	0	0	0
Having a need in bad times	0	1	1	
Lonely	1	0	0	0
Avoiding to visit deceased's house	0	1	0	1
Relaxing in temple	2	1	0	0
Cannot dragging out	0	1	0	0
Wishing if happened later	0	0	2	0
Giving same name to daughter	0	0	1	0
Memories are in head	1	1	0	1
Thinking about good times together	0	1	2	1
Cannot forget	0	2	1	0
Getting depressed whenever think	0	1	0	1
Idealising the deceased	0	2	1	0
Valuing things more	0	0	0	2
Praying	0	1	0	1
Wishing deceased visited in dreams	0	1	0	0
Superstitious	0	1	0	0
Close than when alive	0	1	0	0
Stress and headache	0	1	0	0

Below are examples of some codes describing the current feelings of participants towards the deceased and their past experience of bereavement.

***Having changed in sadness***

This code indicted accounts suggesting that feelings change may over time – the deceased may still be missed but perspective may be different. “What is happening in your life at that time and should grow up. So maybe you don’t have the same intensity of feelings now when you do think

about it. You feel sadness but you don't feel like "I am sad". You feel that this was a sad thing that happened but you don't... and you know that there is a feeling of sadness but you don't experience it at that same level when you are older looking back now." (Participant 1, p.4)

### ***Fear of getting close to others***

This code described accounts of participant suggesting fearful and insecure feelings about making close relationships, as a result of the loss. "Sometimes I get scared being close to people like what if I lose them, what if they go away. What I am going to do then? But then I get these feelings you know that he passed away, I go on with life. I met other people. Life doesn't stop so... sometimes I get scared getting close to people, just because I don't want to lose them." (Participant 16, p.4)

### ***Feeling happy***

This code evolved from accounts of positive feeling in memories of the deceased. "When I look back, I can picture her, I can picture her house. It is fine and it doesn't hurt me anymore. I can do that and feel glad." (Participant 12, p.4)

### ***Wishing the deceased to be alive***

This code described narratives of continuing longing for the deceased. "Today if I remember I always just think that she would have been here how happy she would have been to see how I am on this position and I am studying for a PhD and I am here independent with all my own struggle in London completed my masters, independent as she wanted the girls to be." (Participant 6, p.4)

### ***Wishing deceased visit in dreams***

This code emerged from account of turning to spirituality and wishing the deceased visiting in dreams and continues the bond. "Ok, I am very spiritual myself, my sister isn't, she is really opposite. Sometimes I talk about the dead come and visit in your dreams, I am very spiritual like that and my sister doesn't believe in that." (Participant 23, p.5)

### ***Having Patience***

This code described accounts of participants 'feelings of patience in facing the loss of loved one, hoping that eventually the permanence of the loss will be accepted'. "And after that, what I got from this experience is that I have to be patient, especially when you love someone and you lost him, it's so difficult. That's why we had to be patient about that. I had to understand everything logically, we all going to die, you know. But sometimes it's difficult to live without someone you love". (Participant 8, p.5)

In addition to the codes describing the Self, 49 codes describing the other (the deceased) were identified (table 5).

**Table 5: Codes describing the other (deceased) according to attachment styles**

Descriptions of dhe Deceased	Frequency of Occurrence			
	Secure	Preoccupied	Dismissing	Fearful
Supportive	3	5	3	4
Caretaker	2	3	3	3
Loving	1	3	4	4
Nice	3	3	4	1
Friendly	4	1	3	3
Fatherly figure	1	4	4	2
Had a good sense of humour	0	2	0	3
Helpful	1	1	0	2
Sudden illness	1	1	0	4
Long illness	0	1	4	1
Close	2	1	1	2
Guide	1	3	2	1
Inspiration	1	1	0	0
Good behaviour	0	1	0	1
Honest	0	1	0	1
Had patience	0	1	0	0
Taking us out	0	0	2	1
Lived abroad	0	0	1	0
Indirect impact	0	0	1	0
Adored by mum	0	0	1	0
Serious	0	0	1	0
Disciplined	0	1	1	0
Best person	0	1	1	0
Only grandparent	0	0	1	0
Only male in family	0	1	0	0
Wonderful person	0	1	1	0
Taught violin	0	0	1	0
Taught drawing	0	1	0	0
Taught religion	0	1	0	0
Present in all events	0	2	0	0
Suicide	1	1	0	0
Important for mum	0	1	0	0
Important for dad	0	1	0	0
Smiling face	1	0	0	1
Same roots	1	0	0	0
Aback child	1	0	0	0
Sweet boy	2	0	0	0
Drug addicted	1	0	0	0
Bad character	1	0	0	0
Critical	1	1	0	0
Disappointed	1	0	0	0

Guilty	1	0	0	0
Religious	0	1	0	0
Educated	0	1	0	0
A family woman	0	1	0	0
Good hearted	0	1	0	0
Playful	1	0	0	0
Golden haired	0	0	0	1
Business minded	0	1	0	0

### ***Caretaker***

This code developed from narratives presenting the deceased as a primary caretaker and supporter. “I think my mum was a single mum; she wasn’t very good at being a single parent at all. If there hadn’t been my granddad, I don’t think me and my brother would have actually stayed with my mum. We could have been taken away from her. It was my grand dad, he really looked after us, made sure that, you feed and cloths and everything like that”. (Participant 14, p.2)

### ***Taking us out***

This code derived from accounts of the deceased as a source of joy and fun. “He was my uncle. I was very close to him; the whole family was very close to him especially us kids. He used to come after school like for lunch than take us out on the weekends, bring us stuff to eat like you know, he used to work on a store somewhere and he used to buy stuff and everything, he was the only person we used to go out with on weekends, so quite close to him.” (Participant 16, p.1)

### ***Best person***

This code was based on accounts of the deceased as excelling in every role of life. “Best granddad, best husband to my grandmother, best father to my dad and best grandfather to me.” (Participant 9, p.3)

### ***Present in all events***

This code developed from accounts indicating that the deceased was caring and sharing on every occasion. “He was there like all the time like on birthdays and Christmas, buy for me pencils colors, papers to draw. He really showed me how to draw the things.” (Participant 7, p.3)

### ***A family woman***

This code evolved from narratives suggesting that the deceased was the central figure in the family, providing love and care to everyone. “She was like the head of the family, very religious, always talk you about right and wrong. If wrong, she’d let you know, a very good-hearted woman. Always wanted to help the family, she was a family woman, very lovely, yea.” (Participant 23, p.1)

### ***Drug addicted***

This code emerged from the description suggesting the deceased was drug addicted just before the death. “It’s a really long story because she met a boy and she got into very bad group of friends and she became really drug addicted too. My mother started to hate her.” (Participant 3, p.3)

**Phase 2**

Detailed codes had been condensed into more inclusive and fewer themes that describe participants' experience of bereavement. In this analysis, seven general themes were found for the Self as they appeared in the past, three themes for the Self as they appeared in the present and five themes for the deceased. Classification was based on commonalities between the detailed codes identified in Phase 1. For example, in Self-past the more general theme *Self is suppressing feelings* was evolved from the interlinked codes: suppressing grief, avoiding to talk, couldn't cry, and hurting. It was evident from those codes that they all described how the self was trying to hide and suppress negative emotions and distress.

The theme *Self has somatic reactions* was the common result of codes such as tearful, stopped eating, getting ill, and having a headache. These codes were linked to reactions of somatization of distress. On the other hand, the theme *Self has psychological difficulties* evolved from codes suggesting psychological difficulties such as declining in school performance, having psychological problem, and insecure. The theme *Self is seeking contact with the deceased* emerged from codes such as seeking, dreaming, regularly visiting grave, and turning to deceased in bad times while the theme *Self cannot understand death* came from the codes having little understanding of death and having late realization of loss and disbelieving. Finally, the theme *Self is consumed* evolved from the codes having a sense of disappearance and empty/vague, while the theme *Self feels positive* derived from the code getting matured.

**Table 6: Themes describing the past Self according to attachment style**

Codes	General Themes	Frequency of occurrence			
		Secure	Preoccupied	Dismissing	Fearful
Suppressing grief	<b>Self is suppressing feelings</b>	2	2	3	1
Avoiding to talk		1	0	2	3
Couldn't cry		0	1	1	0
Hurting		0	2	0	1
Total Frequency		<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>
Tearful	<b>Self has somatic reactions</b>	2	2	5	4
Stopped eating		0	0	1	1
Getting ill		0	1	1	0
Having headache		0	1	0	0
Total Frequency		<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>
Declining in school performance	<b>Self has psychological difficulties</b>	1	3	1	2
Having psychological problem		1	2	1	1
Insecure		0	0	1	0
Total Frequency		<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
Seeking		<b>Self is seeking contact with deceased</b>	2	2	0
Dreaming	0		2	0	1
Regularly visiting grave	0		0	1	0

Turning to deceased in bad times		0	2	0	0
	Total Frequency	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
Having little understanding of death	<b>Self cannot understand</b>	1	1	0	0
Having late realization of loss	<b>death</b>	1	2	0	1
Disbelieving		0	1	0	3
	Total Frequency	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>
Having a sense of disappearance	<b>Self is consumed</b>	0	1	0	0
Empty/vague		0	2	0	0
	Total Frequency	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Getting mature	<b>Self feels positive</b>	0	0	2	0
	Total Frequency	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>

Moreover, different general themes for the Self as described at the present also came from codes with common elements. The theme *Self wishes closeness* had been emerged from codes missing, remembering, still talking about, wishing the deceased to be alive, keeping things as memorial, visiting graves, having need in bad times, giving same name to daughter, having memories in head, thinking about good time together, and cannot forget. The theme *Self is in peace* came from integrating the interlinked codes feeling happy with memory, having change in sadness, having patience, strong, relaxing in temple, and valuing things more. Finally, the theme *Self is still affected* evolved from the codes having same feelings, fear of getting close to others, still crying, feeling sorry, lonely, avoiding visit deceased's house, cannot drag her out, getting depressed whenever think, and idealizing the deceased.

**Table 7: Themes describing the current Self according to attachment style**

Codes	General themes	Frequency of Occurrence			
		Secure	Preoccupied	Dismissing	Fearful
Missing	<b>Self-wishes closeness</b>	6	6	6	6
Remembering		6	6	6	6
Still talking about		2	3	5	3
Dreaming		1	4	0	0
Wishing the deceased to be alive		0	2	1	2
Keeping things as memorial		1	1	1	0
Visiting grave		1	0	0	0
Having need in bad times		0	0	1	0
Giving same name to daughter		0	0	1	0
Having memories in head		1	0	0	1
Thinking about good times together		0	0	2	1

Cannot forget		0	1	1	0
	Total Frequency	<b>18</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>19</b>
Feeling happy with memory	<b>Self is in peace</b>	6	3	4	3
Having change in sadness		4	3	4	1
Having patience		1	1	0	0
Strong		3	2	1	0
Relaxing in temple		2	1	0	0
Valuing things more		0	0	0	2
	Total Frequency	<b>16</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>
Having same feelings	<b>Self is still affected</b>	2	2	2	4
Fear of getting close to others		0	1	1	2
Still crying		1	0	2	0
Feeling sorry		1	0	1	1
Lonely		1	0	0	0
Avoiding visit deceased's house		0	1	0	1
Cannot drag her out		0	1	0	0
Getting depressed whenever think		0	1	0	1
Idealizing the deceased		0	2	1	0
	Total Frequency	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>

More general themes that describe the deceased also identified. The first was *deceased was supportive/emotionally close* being evolved from the codes supportive, caretaker, loving, helpful and close. The second theme *deceased had positive social attributes* came from the codes nice, friendly, had a good sense of humor, good behavior, had patience, honest, outing and stuff, best person, wonderful person, present in all events, smiling face, aback child and sweet boy. The third theme *deceased had leadership qualities* was the common thread of the codes fatherly figure, guide, a family woman, inspiration, and indirect impact. The theme *deceased was vulnerable* evolved from the codes sudden illness, long illness, suicide and drug addicted while the theme *deceased was competent* included the codes disciplined, taught violin, taught drawing, taught religion, educated and business minded.



**Table 8: Themes describing the other (deceased) according to attachment style**

Codes	General Themes	Frequency of occurrence			
		Secure	Preoccupied	Dismissing	Fearful
Supportive	Deceased was	3	5	3	4
Caretaker	supportive/emotion	2	3	3	3
Loving	ally close	1	3	4	4
Helpful		1	1	0	2
Close		2	1	1	2
	<b>Total Frequency</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>15</b>
Nice	Deceased had	3	3	4	1
Friendly	positive social	4	1	3	3
Had a good sense of humour	attributes	0	2	0	3
Good behaviour		0	1	0	1
Had patience		0	1	0	0
Honest		0	1	0	1
Outing and stuff		0	0	2	1
Best person		0	1	1	0
Wonderful person		0	1	1	0
Present in all events		0	2	0	0
Smiling face		1	0	0	1
Aback child		1	0	0	0
Sweet boy		2	0	0	0
	<b>Total Frequency</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>
Fatherly figure	Deceased had	1	5	4	2
	leadership qualities				
Guide		1	3	2	1
A family woman		0	1	0	0
Inspiration		1	1	0	0
Indirect impact		0	0	1	0
	<b>Total Frequency</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>
Sudden illness	Deceased was	1	1	0	4
Long illness	vulnerable	0	1	4	1
Suicide		1	1	0	0
Drug addicted		1	0	0	0
	<b>Total Frequency</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Disciplined	Deceased was	0	1	1	0
Taught violin	competent	0	0	1	0
Taught drawing		0	1	0	0
Taught religion		0	1	0	0
Educated		0	1	0	0
Business minded		0	1	0	0
	<b>Total Frequency</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>

## Discussion

This study looked at whether participants reported different narratives depending on their attachment preferences. The findings supported the study questions. Actual events in the past were not the main concern in this study rather to find out how participants recalled and reported their bereavement experience during childhood. Attachment literature had been consulted in finding the association between the narratives and attachment style of the participants. Themes in self in past, included *somatization*, evident among participants with dismissing and fearful attachment styles. Research indicates that attachment avoidance defines dismissing and fearful attachment styles (Bartholomew, 1990). Moreover, somatic problems in adulthood have been rooted in traumatic experience in childhood (Waldinger, et.al, 2006).

The theme *self is seeking contact* was prominent in preoccupied individuals as compare to other attachment styles. Research (Bartholomew, 1990) indicates that dismissing and fearful attachment styles are the outcome of attachment avoidance while preoccupied seeks closeness even with the deceased. They are clingy and report inconsistency in responsiveness of the caregiver and think themselves as unlovable (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Participants with preoccupied and fearful attachment styles reported the theme *lack of death understanding*. The research supports these findings and shows that fearful individuals are confused and disorganized in cognition (Reis & Grenyer, 2004). Moreover, preoccupied are less interested in talking about the deceased as dead to avoid the unbearable experience. *Self is consumed* is another important theme expressed by the preoccupied attachment style. Research, (Collins & Read, 1994), says that preoccupied feels lost with the loss of attachment figure as they are highly dependent on them.

All insecure attachment styles showed the theme *self is suppressing feelings*. Research shows that deactivation is adopted to avoid concerns related to attachment figure (Dozier & Kobak, 1992). Fraley and Shaver, (1997) report that Individuals with avoidant attachment style show suppression and specially the negative side of their attachment relationship and report less recalling to minimize the interdependence in their relationship. While individuals with preoccupied attachment style also suppress the feelings to avoid vulnerability and helplessness (Mikulincer, Dolev, & Shaver, 2004). Current experience of the self-shows the theme *self is in peace* is more prevailing among individuals with secure attachment style. This is supported by the research as secure people move on in life and are less victimized by unresolved grief and distress (Parkes, 2006).

*Self-wishes closeness* is a theme strongly shown by dismissing and preoccupied individuals. Parkes, (2006) Showed that individuals with dismissing attachment style show independence and withdrawal in interpersonal relationships and are comfortable to show closeness to the deceased more as compare to when they were alive because its less risky in abandonment. This is evident in past self-themes when it was low in dismissing individuals.–The theme *self is still affected* is evident in fearful and preoccupied. Higher scores in attachment anxiety show they are still undergoing the process of grieving while secure are no more under this condition. Research supports these findings such as (Parkes, 2006); (Schmidt, Nachtigall, Wuethrich-Martone, & Strauss, 2002).

The themes that indicate representations of the significant dead are that *deceased was supportive* was higher in fearful than in secure. This is evident from previous research that when there is no chances rejection, fearful are more positive in their relationship to the deceased (Reis & Grenyer, 2004) while secure move on with current relationships.

*Had leadership qualities, was competent and had positive social attributes* are a few more themes that are evident in preoccupied because they want to be safe and dependent on others who are strong, and also use exaggeration in showing close relationships (Shaver and Clark, 1994). The findings of current study extend past studies by utilizing retrospective accounts and indicates different types of narratives generated by that university students with different attachment styles about their childhood bereavement experience. Retrospective research on bereaved carers, who lost different significant relationships by death, reported loss, sadness and loneliness as major themes in their narratives (Finley & Payne, 2010).

Furthermore, 60 women interviewed in a recent study by using Adult Attachment Interview (George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985) to examine childhood attachment and experience of bereavement. The findings showed that securely attached women reported lower tendency in unresolved grief by Beverung and Jacobvitz (2014), which supports current study. The findings of current study indicates that adult attachment style is linked with how individuals understand childhood bereavement experience at present. The accounts they provided show how they understand what happened now regardless of whether they themselves make distinctions between now and then. As they say what they say now, their accounts reflect their current state of mind in relation to the past bereavement.

Childhood bereavement is linked to attachment type in adulthood. This study will aid in the advancement of the attachment theory perspective on bereavement in children.

### **Limitations of Study**

Retrospective accounts are a limitation in current study which is based on memory and such recalling may not exact. Previous studies shows that memories with emotional attributes are more reliable rather than non-emotional memories (Seifert, 2012). Rather according to (Melchert and Sayger, 1998) retrospective analysis is effective method for assessment of past experiences. Current study does not aim to identify exact events but aims to understand the personal accounts of the past experience and its relation to attachment style. The reconstruction of the events subjectively was the main purpose of this study,

Another limitation is the second rating was not possible with interview transcripts because of the shortage of time and resources to minimize biasness. Research supervisor act as data analyst and followed every stage closely

### **Implications of the Study**

The present findings confirm an association between childhood bereavement experience and current attachment styles. This study confirms such links using a different methodological and conceptual attachment framework. The present findings highlight the relevance of attachment research in understanding the association between the childhood experiences and current narrations. The study of bereavement in childhood from an attachment perspective is still in its initial stages. This will attempt to advance our knowledge in the field.

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