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**Role of Childhood Trauma on Adult Attachment Styles in
Nepal**

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to assess the role of childhood trauma on adult attachment styles in Nepal.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: The study indicated that childhood trauma significantly influences adult attachment styles, shaping how individuals form and maintain relationships throughout their lives. Studies have shown that experiences such as abuse, neglect, or unstable family environments during childhood can disrupt the development of secure attachment patterns. Adults who have experienced trauma in childhood often exhibit insecure attachment styles, including anxious-preoccupied, dismissive-avoidant, or fearful-avoidant attachments. These individuals may struggle with intimacy, trust issues, and difficulty in forming close bonds with others. Moreover, the impact of childhood trauma on attachment styles can vary based on factors such as the type and severity of trauma, the presence of supportive

caregivers, and subsequent life experiences. For instance, individuals who have experienced consistent support and nurturing following trauma may show more resilience in developing secure attachments later in life. However, those who lack such support may continue to exhibit insecure attachment patterns characterized by emotional dysregulation, fear of abandonment, or avoidance of emotional closeness. Understanding the role of childhood trauma in shaping adult attachment styles is crucial for therapeutic interventions and support strategies.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: Attachment theory, internal working models and trauma theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the role of childhood trauma on adult attachment styles in Nepal. In practice, trauma-informed interventions are paramount, addressing both the psychological aftermath of childhood trauma and the resultant attachment-related challenges. At the policy level, there is a need to advocate for initiatives that prioritize early identification and intervention for children exposed to trauma, ensuring access to trauma-informed mental health services and support networks.

Keywords: *Childhood Trauma, Adult, Attachment Styles*

INTRODUCTION

Childhood trauma significantly shapes adult attachment styles, influencing how individuals form and maintain relationships throughout their lives. Adult attachment styles, measured by adult attachment style inventories, include secure, anxious, avoidant, and disorganized attachment. In the USA, approximately 50% of adults are classified as having a secure attachment style, with anxious and avoidant styles each accounting for around 20%, and disorganized attachment making up the remaining 10% (Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 2018). In Japan, similar patterns are observed, though the prevalence of secure attachment is slightly lower at 45%, and there is a higher incidence of anxious attachment at about 25% (Takahashi, 2019). These trends suggest that despite cultural differences, secure attachment remains the most common style in developed economies. The prevalence of various attachment styles is indicative of the societal and familial structures within these nations, reflecting the influence of social support systems and parenting practices (Smith, 2020).

In developing economies, the distribution of attachment styles can differ significantly due to variations in socio-economic factors and cultural contexts. For example, in India, research indicates that secure attachment is present in about 40% of adults, with higher rates of anxious (30%) and avoidant (20%) attachment styles (Rane & Shroff, 2020). In Brazil, secure attachment is reported in 35% of adults, with avoidant and anxious styles each constituting about 25% (Oliveira & Lins, 2019). These figures highlight the impact of economic instability and differing family dynamics on attachment styles. The disparities in attachment styles between developed and developing economies underscore the role of broader socio-economic conditions in shaping interpersonal relationships (Patel & Rao, 2018).

In China, adult attachment styles also exhibit unique trends, with secure attachment present in approximately 42% of the population. The rates of anxious and avoidant attachment are about 29% and 21%, respectively (Chen & Zhang, 2019). In Turkey, secure attachment is seen in 40% of adults, with anxious attachment at 26% and avoidant attachment at 24% (Yildirim & Demir, 2020). These trends highlight how cultural norms, economic instability, and varying parenting styles influence attachment in developing economies. In countries like Indonesia, secure attachment accounts for 37% of the population, while anxious attachment is 31% and avoidant is 23% (Sari & Prasetyo, 2019). Such patterns reflect broader socio-economic conditions and the significant role of familial and community structures in shaping attachment styles (Liang & Chen, 2020).

In developing economies, the diversity of adult attachment styles is influenced by a range of socio-economic and cultural factors. In Vietnam, about 36% of adults are securely attached, while anxious attachment is seen in 32% and avoidant attachment in 25% (Tran & Nguyen, 2020). In Pakistan, secure attachment is found in approximately 34% of adults, with anxious attachment at 31% and avoidant attachment at 26% (Khan & Masood, 2019). In Egypt, research indicates that 33% of adults exhibit secure attachment, 30% anxious attachment, and 28% avoidant attachment (Abdel-Khalek & Soliman, 2021). These trends reflect the influence of socio-economic instability, cultural norms, and family dynamics on attachment styles, highlighting the significant presence of insecure attachment in these regions.

In Peru, secure attachment is observed in about 35% of adults, with anxious and avoidant attachment styles each at around 30% (Lopez & Valdivia, 2021). In Colombia, approximately 37% of adults exhibit secure attachment, while anxious attachment is present in 28% and avoidant

attachment in 26% (Rodriguez & Garcia, 2019). In Bangladesh, secure attachment accounts for 32% of the adult population, with anxious attachment at 34% and avoidant attachment at 25% (Rahman & Akhter, 2020). In the Philippines, secure attachment is found in about 39% of adults, with anxious attachment at 27% and avoidant attachment at 25% (Garcia & Bautista, 2020). These statistics suggest that despite cultural and economic differences, developing economies exhibit a significant proportion of insecure attachment styles, driven by various socio-economic and familial factors.

Nigeria shows similar trends, with secure attachment in 28% of adults, anxious attachment at 32%, and avoidant attachment at 27% (Adeoye, 2022). In Ghana, secure attachment is present in about 29% of adults, while anxious attachment accounts for 33% and avoidant attachment for 26% (Mensah & Ankomah, 2020). These patterns underscore the influence of economic instability, health crises, and communal living arrangements on attachment styles in sub-Saharan Africa.

In Ethiopia, approximately 31% of adults exhibit secure attachment, with anxious and avoidant attachments at 34% and 24%, respectively (Tadesse & Bekele, 2019). In Ghana, secure attachment is present in about 29% of adults, while anxious attachment accounts for 33% and avoidant attachment for 26% (Mensah & Ankomah, 2020). These figures highlight the significant role of socio-economic stressors, such as poverty and unemployment, as well as the impact of traditional extended family systems on adult attachment styles. The relatively lower prevalence of secure attachment in sub-Saharan Africa compared to developed and other developing regions reflects the unique socio-cultural and economic contexts of these countries (Mensah & Ankomah, 2020).

In sub-Saharan Africa, attachment styles reflect unique cultural and socio-economic conditions. In South Africa, for instance, studies show that secure attachment is found in 30% of adults, with anxious attachment at 35% and avoidant attachment at 25% (Ngcobo & Dlamini, 2021). In Nigeria, secure attachment is seen in 28% of adults, while anxious and avoidant attachments are 32% and 27%, respectively (Adeoye, 2022). These trends suggest that the high levels of socio-economic stress and instability in many sub-Saharan countries contribute to lower levels of secure attachment. Cultural practices, including extended family networks and community child-rearing, also play a significant role in shaping attachment styles in these regions (Mensah & Ankomah, 2020).

In sub-Saharan Africa, adult attachment styles show distinct patterns shaped by socio-economic challenges and cultural practices. In South Africa, about 30% of adults are securely attached, while 35% exhibit anxious attachment, and 25% show avoidant attachment styles (Ngcobo & Dlamini, 2021). Nigeria shows similar trends, with secure attachment in 28% of adults, anxious attachment at 32%, and avoidant attachment at 27% (Adeoye, 2022). In Kenya, secure attachment is seen in about 33% of adults, with anxious attachment at 30% and avoidant attachment at 26% (Mwangi & Kamau, 2020). These patterns underscore the influence of economic instability, health crises, and communal living arrangements on attachment styles in sub-Saharan Africa.

The presence and severity of childhood trauma, as measured by childhood trauma questionnaires, can significantly impact adult attachment styles. Childhood trauma can manifest in various forms, such as physical abuse, emotional neglect, sexual abuse, and witnessing domestic violence. Study by Johnson, Smith & Thompson (2019) suggests that individuals who have experienced high levels of childhood trauma, particularly those involving emotional and physical abuse, are more likely to

exhibit anxious attachment styles in adulthood. This attachment style is characterized by a fear of abandonment, a strong desire for closeness, and heightened sensitivity to relationship dynamics.

Furthermore, childhood trauma can also lead to avoidant attachment styles in adulthood, as indicated by studies such as Smith and Brown (2020). Individuals who have experienced neglect or emotional unavailability during childhood may develop a tendency to avoid emotional intimacy and maintain emotional distance in their adult relationships. Moreover, severe childhood trauma, such as repeated exposure to violence or severe neglect, can contribute to disorganized attachment styles in adulthood. This attachment style is marked by contradictory behaviors, fearfulness, and difficulties in regulating emotions (Jones & Miller, 2018). Overall, the presence and severity of childhood trauma play a crucial role in shaping adult attachment styles, with implications for interpersonal relationships and psychological well-being.

Problem Statement

The Role of childhood trauma on adult attachment styles remains a critical area of research, as evidenced by recent studies highlighting the complex interplay between early life experiences and adult relationship dynamics (Johnson, 2019; Smith, 2020; Jones, 2023). Despite considerable advancements in understanding the impact of childhood trauma on attachment styles, gaps persist in comprehensively elucidating the mechanisms through which specific types and severities of childhood trauma influence the development of anxious, avoidant, and disorganized attachment patterns in adulthood (Brown, 2018; Thompson, 2022). Furthermore, there is a need for longitudinal investigations that explore the long-term effects of childhood trauma on attachment styles across diverse populations, taking into account cultural, social, and contextual factors that may moderate or mediate this relationship (Miller, 2021; Adams, 2019). Additionally, the role of resilience factors and protective mechanisms in mitigating the adverse effects of childhood trauma on attachment styles warrants further exploration to inform targeted interventions and therapeutic approaches aimed at improving relational outcomes and psychological well-being in trauma-affected individuals (Clark, 2020; Garcia, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory posits that early experiences with caregivers significantly influence the development of attachment styles in adulthood. Bowlby emphasized the importance of a secure attachment bond during infancy, suggesting that it lays the foundation for healthy relationships later in life. In the context of childhood trauma, attachment theory is relevant as it helps understand how disruptions in early caregiving due to trauma can lead to insecure attachment styles in adulthood (Jones, 2019).

Internal Working Models

Building upon attachment theory, Ainsworth proposed the concept of internal working models, which are mental representations of self and others developed based on early attachment experiences. These models guide individuals' expectations and behaviors in relationships. Childhood trauma can distort these internal working models, leading to maladaptive attachment patterns characterized by anxiety, avoidance, or disorganization (Smith, 2021).

Trauma Theory

Trauma theory focuses on the psychological and emotional impact of traumatic experiences on individuals. Herman's theory emphasizes the role of trauma in disrupting normal developmental processes, including the formation of secure attachment bonds. Traumatic events during childhood can overwhelm coping mechanisms, leading to challenges in forming and maintaining healthy attachment styles in adulthood (Clark, 2022).

Empirical Review

Johnson (2018) investigated the relationship between childhood trauma and adult attachment styles. The study involved a diverse sample of 500 participants, ranging in age from 25 to 60 years, who completed validated childhood trauma questionnaires and adult attachment style inventories. The purpose of the study was to explore how different types and levels of childhood trauma, including emotional neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse, influence the development of attachment styles in adulthood. The methodology included statistical analyses to examine correlations between trauma severity scores and adult attachment style classifications. The findings revealed a significant association between the severity of childhood trauma and the development of anxious attachment styles in adulthood. Specifically, individuals who reported higher levels of childhood trauma, particularly emotional and physical abuse, were more likely to exhibit anxious attachment patterns characterized by fear of abandonment and a heightened need for reassurance in relationships. Based on these results, the study recommended early intervention strategies and trauma-informed therapy to address attachment-related difficulties in trauma survivors, emphasizing the importance of providing supportive and secure environments for individuals with trauma histories.

Smith (2019) examined the mediating role of emotional regulation in the relationship between childhood trauma and adult attachment styles. The study recruited a sample of 300 participants, equally distributed across age groups, gender, and trauma severity levels, who completed self-report measures of childhood trauma, emotional regulation abilities, and adult attachment styles. The study's purpose was to investigate how the capacity to regulate emotions influences the development of secure or insecure attachment styles in individuals with histories of childhood trauma. The methodology involved conducting regression analyses to assess the mediating effect of emotional regulation on the relationship between trauma exposure and attachment style classifications. The findings indicated that emotional regulation significantly mediated the association between childhood trauma and both anxious and avoidant attachment styles in adulthood. Participants with better emotional regulation skills were more likely to develop secure attachment patterns, while those with deficits in emotional regulation tended to exhibit insecure attachment styles characterized by anxiety or avoidance in relationships. Consequently, the study recommended incorporating emotion-focused interventions into therapeutic approaches for trauma survivors to improve attachment-related outcomes, emphasizing the importance of enhancing emotional awareness and regulation skills in trauma recovery processes.

Thompson (2020) explored the moderating effect of social support on the relationship between childhood trauma and adult attachment styles. The study employed qualitative interviews with 50 trauma survivors and quantitative analysis of attachment style measures and social support scales. The purpose of the study was to investigate how social support networks and resources influence attachment patterns in individuals with histories of childhood trauma. The methodology included

thematic analysis of interview transcripts and statistical analyses to examine correlations between social support scores, trauma severity, and attachment style classifications. The findings revealed that social support moderated the impact of childhood trauma on adult attachment, with higher levels of support buffering against attachment-related difficulties. Participants who reported strong social support networks and positive interpersonal relationships were more likely to develop secure attachment styles, even in the presence of significant childhood trauma. In contrast, individuals with limited social support tended to exhibit insecure attachment patterns marked by anxiety or avoidance. Consequently, the study recommended the importance of social networks and community resources in promoting resilience among trauma-affected individuals, highlighting the role of supportive relationships in fostering healthy attachment outcomes.

Rodriguez (2021) examined the role of cultural factors in shaping the relationship between childhood trauma and adult attachment styles. The study recruited participants from diverse cultural backgrounds, including Western and non-Western societies, and utilized standardized measures of childhood trauma exposure and attachment style classifications. The purpose of the study was to explore how cultural norms, values, and beliefs influence the manifestation and expression of attachment patterns in trauma survivors. The methodology involved quantitative analysis of survey data and qualitative analysis of cultural themes and narratives related to attachment experiences. The findings revealed that cultural context played a significant role in shaping attachment styles among trauma survivors. Cultural norms around family dynamics, emotional expression, and social support influenced the prevalence and manifestation of secure or insecure attachment patterns. The study recommended culturally informed assessment and treatment strategies to address attachment-related challenges among individuals with trauma histories, emphasizing the importance of considering cultural context in therapeutic interventions.

Brown (2022) investigated gender differences in the impact of childhood trauma on adult attachment styles. The study analyzed attachment style profiles between male and female trauma survivors, controlling for trauma severity and duration. The purpose of the study was to examine how gender influences the development of attachment patterns in response to childhood trauma experiences. The methodology included statistical comparisons of attachment style distributions and qualitative analysis of gender-specific coping strategies and relational patterns. The findings highlighted significant gender differences in the prevalence and expression of attachment styles among trauma survivors. Female participants were more likely to exhibit anxious attachment patterns characterized by fear of abandonment and preoccupation with relationships, whereas male participants tended to display avoidant attachment styles marked by emotional distance and self-reliance. These gender-specific differences were attributed to socialization processes, societal expectations, and coping mechanisms. Consequently, the study recommended tailored approaches that account for gender-specific coping mechanisms and relational patterns in trauma recovery, emphasizing the importance of considering gender dynamics in therapeutic interventions.

Jones (2018) investigated the impact of childhood trauma on disorganized attachment styles in adulthood. The study followed a cohort of trauma-exposed individuals from childhood to adulthood, utilizing semi-structured interviews and attachment assessments at multiple time points. The purpose of the study was to examine how severe and interpersonal trauma experiences influence the development of disorganized attachment patterns. The methodology included qualitative analysis of interview transcripts and quantitative assessment of attachment style classifications. The findings indicated that childhood trauma, particularly severe and interpersonal

trauma such as abuse and neglect, was associated with higher rates of disorganized attachment in adulthood. Participants who reported traumatic experiences characterized by disruptions in caregiving relationships, such as inconsistent or abusive parenting, were more likely to exhibit disorganized attachment patterns marked by fearfulness, emotional dysregulation, and difficulties in trusting others. Consequently, the study emphasized the need for trauma-focused therapies that address disorganization in attachment patterns, highlighting the importance of creating safe and stable attachment relationships in trauma recovery processes.

Clark (2023) examined the role of resilience factors in mitigating the impact of childhood trauma on adult attachment styles. The study involved in-depth interviews with trauma survivors identified as resilient based on adaptive coping strategies, positive outcomes, and secure attachment patterns. The purpose of the study was to explore how resilience factors, such as social support, self-efficacy, and cognitive restructuring, contribute to the development of secure attachment styles despite childhood trauma experiences. The methodology included thematic analysis of interview data and identification of resilience themes and narratives. The findings highlighted that resilience factors played a crucial role in fostering secure attachment styles among trauma survivors. Participants who demonstrated resilience through active coping strategies, positive self-perceptions, and healthy relational patterns were more likely to develop secure attachment styles characterized by trust, emotional intimacy, and adaptive relationship behaviors. Consequently, the study recommended resilience-focused interventions to promote healthy attachment outcomes among trauma survivors, emphasizing the importance of enhancing resilience factors in trauma recovery processes.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

RESULTS

Conceptual Gap: The study by Brown (2022) reviewed primarily focus on the direct impact of childhood trauma on adult attachment styles, particularly in terms of anxious and avoidant patterns. However, there is a conceptual gap in understanding the nuanced mechanisms underlying how specific types of childhood trauma, such as emotional neglect versus physical abuse, contribute differently to the development of distinct attachment styles in adulthood. Exploring these nuanced associations could provide a deeper understanding of the specific pathways through which childhood trauma influences attachment outcomes.

Contextual Gap: While some studies touch on the role of social support and cultural factors in moderating the impact of childhood trauma on attachment styles, there remains a contextual gap in understanding how broader contextual factors, such as socioeconomic status, cultural norms, and access to mental health services, interact with childhood trauma experiences to shape adult attachment patterns. Investigating these contextual influences within diverse populations and cultural contexts could offer valuable insights into the variability of attachment outcomes across different social environments (Clark, 2023).

Geographical Gap: The study by Jones (2018) primarily focus on developed economies or Western cultural contexts, with limited representation from developing economies or non-Western cultures. This geographical gap highlights the need for research that explores how childhood trauma and attachment styles manifest and interact within diverse global contexts, considering factors such as collectivist versus individualistic cultures, trauma prevalence rates, and cultural beliefs about attachment and emotional regulation. Bridging this geographical gap can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the universality versus cultural specificity of attachment processes in trauma-affected populations worldwide.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The role of childhood trauma in shaping adult attachment styles is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, as evidenced by the diverse empirical studies reviewed. These studies collectively underscore the profound impact that early adverse experiences can have on individuals' attachment patterns and interpersonal relationships throughout adulthood. The findings consistently highlight the association between childhood trauma severity and the development of insecure attachment styles, particularly anxious and avoidant patterns, characterized by fear, mistrust, and difficulties in forming close and intimate connections.

Moreover, the studies emphasize the mediating and moderating factors that influence the trajectory of attachment outcomes in trauma survivors. Factors such as emotional regulation abilities, social support networks, cultural norms, and resilience factors play crucial roles in either exacerbating or buffering the effects of childhood trauma on attachment styles. Understanding these nuanced mechanisms is essential for designing effective intervention strategies that address attachment-related difficulties in trauma-affected individuals.

Despite significant advancements in research, several gaps remain, particularly in understanding the differential impact of specific types of childhood trauma, the role of broader contextual factors, and the cross-cultural variations in attachment outcomes. Future research efforts should aim to address these gaps to enhance our theoretical understanding and inform targeted interventions tailored to diverse populations and cultural contexts. In conclusion, the studies reviewed underscore the enduring influence of childhood trauma on adult attachment styles, highlighting the need for comprehensive trauma-informed approaches that integrate emotional regulation skills, social support systems, and culturally sensitive interventions to promote healthy attachment outcomes and facilitate healing in trauma survivors.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

Theory

To advance theoretical understanding, longitudinal studies are recommended, tracking individuals from childhood into adulthood to gauge the enduring impact of specific childhood traumas on adult attachment styles. These studies should delve into the intricate mechanisms through which childhood trauma shapes attachment patterns, examining factors like emotional regulation, cognitive processes, and relational trust. Integrating attachment theory with resilience and trauma theories can yield a more comprehensive framework for comprehending how trauma exposure

intertwines with attachment outcomes and resilience factors, enriching theoretical models in developmental psychology and trauma studies.

Practice

In practice, trauma-informed interventions are paramount, addressing both the psychological aftermath of childhood trauma and the resultant attachment-related challenges. Early prevention programs should be designed to foster secure attachment in vulnerable populations through caregiver training, parent support initiatives, and child-centered interventions. Psychoeducation and therapeutic approaches must focus on enhancing emotional regulation abilities, nurturing healthy relationship dynamics, and targeting attachment-specific issues encountered by trauma survivors, thereby promoting healing and resilience in affected individuals.

Policy

At the policy level, there is a need to advocate for initiatives that prioritize early identification and intervention for children exposed to trauma, ensuring access to trauma-informed mental health services and support networks. Policies should also emphasize trauma-sensitive practices across educational, healthcare, and social service sectors, fostering safe and supportive environments conducive to healing for trauma survivors. Incorporating attachment-informed strategies into policy frameworks concerning child welfare, family services, and mental healthcare is crucial to addressing the distinctive needs of individuals with trauma histories, ultimately contributing to the development of a more compassionate and effective societal support system.

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