

Parental bonding, coping strategies and attachment style among young adults

Ekta Singh ^{1,*} and Soumya Simon ²

¹ *Counselling Psychology, Department of Psychology, Kristu Jayanti College (Autonomous), Bengaluru, Karnataka, India.*

² *Department of Psychology, Kristu Jayanti College (Autonomous), Bengaluru, Karnataka, India.*

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Abstract

This study investigates the complex interplay between parental bonding, attachment styles, and coping strategies among young adults in India, aiming to enhance understanding of how early familial relationships influence psychological resilience and adaptability. Grounded in attachment theory and using a cross-sectional design, the research examines the effects of parental care and overprotection on coping mechanisms and attachment patterns. Data were gathered from 190 Indian young adults (ages 18-25) and analyzed through correlation and ANOVA analyses. Results indicate that parental bonding alone does not predict coping strategies; however, a secure attachment style is positively associated with adaptive coping. This suggests that attachment security may play a more crucial role in coping than parental bonding alone. The study underscores the importance of culturally sensitive mental health interventions, which could aid young adults in fostering secure attachments to strengthen coping skills. Key limitations include the cross-sectional design and reliance on self-report measures, suggesting a need for longitudinal research to observe how parental bonding, attachment, and coping evolve over time. Findings contribute to the field by emphasizing secure attachment's critical role in fostering psychological resilience in the Indian cultural context, highlighting potential pathways for culturally tailored interventions in mental health.

Keywords: Parental bonding; Coping strategies; Attachment style; Young adults; India; Parental influence; Family dynamics; Adaptive coping; Mental health

1. Introduction

The interplay between parental bonding, attachment styles, and coping strategies plays a crucial role in shaping the psychological well-being and adaptive functioning of young adults. The transition to adulthood involves significant changes in identity formation, autonomy, and social relationships, making it essential to examine how early parental relationships influence attachment security and coping mechanisms. Parental bonding, defined as the emotional connection between parents and children, has been found to significantly impact mental health outcomes throughout life [1]. It consists of two primary dimensions: care (parental warmth, affection, and support) and overprotection (control, intrusion, and excessive regulation). Research suggests that high parental care with low overprotection fosters greater self-esteem, emotional regulation, and resilience, whereas high overprotection with low care is associated with heightened anxiety, depression, and emotional distress [2]. These parental bonding patterns are key determinants of later attachment styles and coping mechanisms, influencing how individuals navigate stress and interpersonal relationships [3].

Attachment theory, proposed by Bowlby, provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how early attachment experiences shape emotional regulation and interpersonal behaviors [4]. Ainsworth et al. identified four primary attachment styles: secure, anxious-preoccupied, dismissive-avoidant, and fearful-avoidant [5]. Securely attached individuals exhibit healthy emotional regulation and adaptive coping, while insecure attachment styles (anxious-

* Corresponding author: Ekta Singh

preoccupied, dismissive-avoidant, and fearful-avoidant) are associated with dysregulated emotions and maladaptive coping mechanisms [6]. For instance, individuals with anxious-preoccupied attachment tend to engage in excessive reassurance-seeking and rumination, while those with dismissive-avoidant attachment rely on emotional suppression and detachment [7] [8]. These attachment styles significantly influence how individuals perceive and respond to stressors, highlighting the need to examine their role in coping mechanisms among young adults.

Coping strategies are the behavioral and cognitive responses used to manage stress [9]. Young adults face various stressors related to education, career decisions, and relationships, necessitating the use of effective coping mechanisms [10]. Adaptive coping strategies, such as problem-solving and seeking social support, are linked to better psychological resilience, while maladaptive strategies like avoidance, denial, and substance use exacerbate mental health difficulties [11] [12]. Research suggests that secure attachment fosters adaptive coping, whereas insecure attachment is associated with maladaptive strategies such as avoidance and emotional suppression [13].

Despite extensive research on these relationships in Western contexts, there is limited exploration of parental bonding, attachment styles, and coping strategies within Indian cultural settings [14]. In collectivistic societies like India, familial expectations and social norms play a significant role in shaping attachment styles and coping mechanisms [15]. Studies indicate that Indian youth often rely on extended family support networks to navigate stress, which may lead to distinct coping patterns compared to Western populations [16]. Given these sociocultural factors, this study aims to examine the relationships between parental bonding, attachment styles, and coping strategies among young adults in India, providing insights for mental health interventions and culturally relevant therapeutic approaches.

1.1. Aim, Objective and Research Questions of the Study

The study aims to investigate how parental bonding influences coping strategies and attachment styles among young adults in India. Given the cultural emphasis on family values and obedience, understanding these relationships can provide insights into the unique psychological development processes of Indian young adults.

- To examine the relationship between parental bonding and coping strategies.
- To investigate the influence of parental bonding on attachment styles.
- To explore the interaction between coping strategies and attachment styles.
- Is there a relationship between Parental Bonding and Coping Strategies?
- Is there a relationship between Parental Bonding and Attachment style?
- Is there a relationship between Coping Strategies and Attachment Style?

1.2. Research Hypotheses

- H1: Parental bonding is associated with coping strategies in young adults in India.
- H2: Parental bonding is associated with attachment styles in young adults in India.
- H3: There's a relationship between Coping Strategies and Attachment Style.

1.3. Significance of the Study

This study aims to deepen understanding of the relationship between parental bonding, coping strategies, and attachment styles among young adults in India, providing valuable insights into factors that influence psychological well-being. By examining how parental bonding (both maternal and paternal) impacts attachment styles and coping mechanisms, this research highlights the role of early parental relationships in shaping young adults' emotional regulation and resilience.

The findings from this study have potential implications for mental health professionals, educators, and policymakers in developing culturally relevant interventions and support systems for young adults. Recognizing the influence of parental bonding on adaptive coping and attachment styles can inform programs designed to enhance mental health outcomes, strengthen family relationships, and promote emotional stability among young adults. Additionally, this study addresses a gap in the literature by focusing on an Indian population, contributing to a more global understanding of these psychological constructs and helping contextualize the role of cultural factors in parent-child

2. Material and methods

2.1. Research design

This study utilized a quantitative approach to examine the relationship between parental bonding, coping strategies, and attachment style among young adults in India.

2.2. Participants

Participants were recruited using convenience sampling technique. The sample consisted of young adults aged 18-25 years who were raised in Indian cultural settings and were currently residing in India. All participants had lived with at least one parent during their formative years (up to 16 years) and had been residing in India for at least the past five years. Individuals with single, separated, or divorced parents were excluded from the study to control for potential confounding variables related to family structure. Only participants who met all inclusion criteria and provided informed consent were included in the final sample.

2.3. Sampling

2.3.1. Techniques Used

Purposive sampling was employed to recruit individuals fitting the study's inclusion criteria.

2.3.2. Inclusion Criteria

- Young adults aged 18-25 years residing in India.
- They have lived with at least one parent during their formative years (up to 16 years)
- Indians who have been raised in Indian cultural setting.

2.3.3. Exclusion Criteria

The exclusion criteria included:

- Individuals who have not lived in India for at least the past five years.
- Individuals with Single or Separated/Divorced parents.

2.4. Tools

2.4.1. Parental Bonding Inventory (PBI)

The Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI), developed by John R. Parker, Gordon C. Tupling, and Rosemary L. Brown, assesses perceived parental styles through two dimensions: Care (12 items) and Overprotection (13 items) [1]. This retrospective measure is completed separately for both parents by adults recalling their first 16 years. The PBI demonstrates strong psychometric properties, with test-retest reliability ranging from 0.76 to 0.88 and Cronbach's alpha values between 0.74 and 0.95, ensuring high internal consistency. Factor analyses confirm its two-factor structure, supporting its theoretical foundation. The PBI also exhibits excellent construct and concurrent validity, correlating significantly with other attachment and parenting measures, making it a reliable tool for assessing parental bonding across diverse populations.

2.4.2. Coping Strategies Inventory Short Form (CSI-SF)

The Coping Strategies Inventory Short Form (CSI-SF), developed by Addison et al., is a 16-item validated tool designed to measure engagement and disengagement coping styles [16]. Engagement coping involves actively confronting stressors (e.g., "I tackle the problem head-on"), while disengagement coping involves avoidance (e.g., "I try not to think about the problem"). Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never to 5 = almost always), with subscale scores ranging from 8 to 40. The CSI-SF demonstrates adequate reliability, with Cronbach's α of 0.70 for engagement and 0.59 for disengagement coping. It was refined from the original 78-item Coping Strategies Inventory (CSI) to provide a more efficient assessment of coping styles.

2.4.3. Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS)

The Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS), developed by Collins & Read (1990), is a widely used 18-item measure assessing adult attachment across three dimensions: Close (comfort with intimacy), Depend (reliance on others), and

Anxiety (concern about relationships) [17]. The RAAS demonstrates good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.72 to 0.85 across subscales, and high test-retest reliability (0.68 to 0.75), indicating stability over time. Factor analyses confirm its three-factor structure, supporting its theoretical foundation. The RAAS also shows strong construct and concurrent validity, correlating well with other attachment and relationship quality measures, making it a reliable tool for assessing adult attachment styles across diverse populations.

2.5. Procedure

Data collection will be conducted online using a structured survey distributed through Google Forms. Participants will first be presented with an informed consent form explaining the purpose of the study, their rights as participants, the voluntary nature of participation and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. Upon agreeing to participate, they will be asked to complete the three questionnaires: the Parental Bonding Inventory (PBI), Coping Strategies Inventory Short Form (CSI-SF), and Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS). Participants will complete the survey online at their convenience, ensuring that responses are gathered efficiently and with minimal disruption to their daily routines.

2.6. Data Analysis

2.6.1. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic data and the scores on the three scales. Measures of central tendency (mean, median) and dispersion (standard deviation) were calculated to describe the distribution of the data.

2.6.2. Inferential Statistics

- Correlation Analysis: Pearson's/Spearman's correlation coefficient was calculated to examine the relationships between parental bonding, coping strategies, and attachment styles.
- ANOVA: ANOVA was conducted to examine the relationship between coping strategies and attachment styles, as well as the relationship between parental bonding and attachment styles.

3. Results

The study aims to investigate how parental bonding influences coping strategies and attachment styles among young adults in India. The data was gathered from 190 Indian young adults between 18 and 25 years old and analyzed using Microsoft Excel and Jamovi (version 2.3.28.0).

The demographic profile of the sample, as shown in Table 1, reveals key characteristics of the respondents. The study included 190 young adults, aged 18 to 25 years, with a gender distribution of 57.9% females ($n = 110$) and 42.1% males ($n = 80$). This gender imbalance may reflect broader societal patterns in India, where young women are often more actively engaged in educational settings. Geographically, the respondents were drawn from various states, with Karnataka having the largest proportion (25.26%) of participants, while states like Goa and Haryana contributed only 0.53% each. This regional variation indicates a diverse representation across the country, though there may be limitations in generalizing the findings to less-represented states.

The demographic profile provides essential context for understanding how the cultural and regional diversity of the sample could influence the study's outcomes. The higher female participation aligns with societal trends in India, where women are often more involved in academic pursuits. This gender skew could impact the analysis of parental bonding and coping strategies, as gender differences may play a role in emotional regulation and attachment styles, which have been previously explored in the literature. Additionally, the regional distribution of respondents allows for an examination of cultural variations in parental bonding practices and attachment styles. For example, urban areas like Delhi and Maharashtra may exhibit distinct parental bonding dynamics compared to more rural regions, possibly affecting coping strategies and attachment styles differently. These demographic insights are crucial for situating the study within the broader theoretical framework, and they suggest that regional and cultural context will need to be considered when interpreting the results. The findings could also offer valuable information for mental health professionals and policymakers in India, addressing the unique psychological needs of young adults based on gender and regional factors.

Table 1 Socio-demographic details of the participants

Demographic Variables	n	% M, SD
Age		
Gender	190	22.0, 3.18
Females	110	57.9%
Males	80	42.1%
State		
Assam	14	7.37%
Bihar	11	5.79%
Delhi	14	7.37%
Goa	1	0.53%
Gujarat	12	6.32%
Haryana	1	0.53%
Jharkhand	5	2.63%
Karnataka	48	25.26%
Kerala	6	3.16%
Maharashtra	16	8.42%
Madhya Pradesh	3	1.58%
Odisha	1	0.53%
Rajasthan	25	13.16%
Tamil Nadu	13	6.84%
Uttar Pradesh	9	4.74%
West Bengal	11	5.79%

Table 2 Shapiro Wilk Normality test for Parental Bonding, Coping Strategies and Attachment Style

Variable	Significance
Parental Bonding (MF)	0.069
Parental Bonding (FF)	< .001*
Coping Strategies	< .001*
Attachment Style	< .001*

The results of the Shapiro-Wilk test of normality, presented in Table 2, reveal important insights into the distribution of the sample, which consists of 190 respondents. For Parental Bonding (MF), the significance value is 0.069, suggesting that this variable does not significantly deviate from normality and thus allows for the use of parametric analyses. However, for Parental Bonding (FF), Coping Strategies, and Attachment Style, the significance values are less than 0.001, indicating that these variables do not follow a normal distribution. This suggests that these variables may be skewed or contain outliers, making parametric tests inappropriate for analyzing their relationships. As a result, Spearman's correlation, a non-parametric test, was chosen to assess the strength and direction of the associations between these variables.

The results of the Shapiro-Wilk test highlight the importance of matching statistical methods to the distribution characteristics of the data. The normal distribution of Parental Bonding (MF) allows for parametric analyses, providing a straightforward approach for examining the relationship between this variable and others. In contrast, the non-normal distributions of Parental Bonding (FF), Coping Strategies, and Attachment Style underscore the need for a non-parametric approach, such as Spearman's correlation, to ensure the accuracy and validity of the analysis. By employing this method, the study is able to account for potential skewness or outliers in the data and provide more reliable insights into the interrelationships between Parental Bonding, Coping Strategies, and Attachment Style.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Parental Bonding (MF)	190	28.8	4.90	-		
2. Parental Bonding (FF)	190	39.6	7.37	0.335	-	
3. Coping Strategies	190	50.9	8.01	0.158	0.789	-

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations for the study variables. The analysis reveals the following correlations between the variables: Parental Bonding (MF) and Coping Strategies show no significant correlation ($r = 0.158$), indicating that there is no meaningful relationship between these two variables. Parental Bonding (FF) and Coping Strategies exhibit no correlation ($r = 0.789$).

Table 4 Mean, Standard Deviation and Analysis of Variance in Attachment Style and Coping Strategies

Measure	Secure		Preoccupied		Dismiss		Fearful		F	η^2
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Engagement coping	22.8	3.71	23.9	4.93	22.6	4.67	21.6	4.52	2.20	0.034
Disengagement coping	20.8	3.34	23.7	4.73	20.9	4.27	21.7	4.46	4.97	0.074

This table presents the mean and standard deviation for two types of coping strategies (Engagement and Disengagement) across different attachment styles: Secure, Preoccupied, Dismissive, and Fearful. For **Engagement coping**, attachment styles did not differ significantly ($F = 2.20$, $\eta^2 = 0.034$), indicating minimal variance in this coping strategy based on attachment style. In contrast, **Disengagement coping** shows a significant difference across attachment styles ($F = 4.97$, $\eta^2 = 0.074$), suggesting that attachment style has a stronger influence on this coping strategy.

Table 5 Mean, Standard Deviation and Analysis of Variance in Parental Bonding Attachment Style

Measure	Secure		Preoccupied		Dismiss		Fearful		F	η^2
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Total Score (MF)	28.3	5.22	28.7	4.32	29.4	5.00	29.1	5.07	8.84	0.160
Total Score (FF)	39.0	6.20	40.5	6.62	40.2	4.43	39.8	8.64	8.84	0.160

This table presents the mean and standard deviation for parental bonding scores (Mother Form [MF] and Father Form [FF]) across four attachment styles: Secure, Preoccupied, Dismissive, and Fearful. Significant differences were observed in both MF and FF total scores among attachment styles ($F = 8.84$, $\eta^2 = 0.160$), indicating that attachment style accounts for 16% of the variance in perceived parental bonding. This suggests that attachment style influences how young adults perceive bonding with both their mothers and fathers.

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations for the study variables. The analysis reveals the following correlations between the variables: Parental Bonding (MF) and Coping Strategies show no significant correlation ($r = 0.158$), indicating that there is no meaningful relationship between these two variables. Parental Bonding (FF) and Coping Strategies exhibit no correlation ($r = 0.789$).

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) results presented in Table 4 reveal differences in coping strategies based on attachment styles, both for engagement and disengagement types. For engagement coping strategies, the mean scores ranged from 21.6 (Fearful) to 23.9 (Preoccupied), with an F-statistic of 2.20 and an eta-squared (η^2) value of 0.034. While the differences were observed, they did not reach statistical significance, suggesting that attachment styles have a relatively modest effect on engagement coping strategies. The highest mean for engagement coping was found in the preoccupied attachment group ($M = 23.9$), while the lowest was in the fearful attachment group ($M = 21.6$).

For disengagement coping strategies, the results were more pronounced, with an F-statistic of 4.97 and an eta-squared (η^2) of 0.074, indicating a significant difference between groups. The mean scores ranged from 20.8 (Secure) to 23.7 (Preoccupied), showing that preoccupied individuals exhibited the highest levels of disengagement coping, significantly higher than those with secure attachment ($M = 20.8$). The effect size for disengagement coping ($\eta^2 = 0.074$) suggests that attachment style plays a more substantial role in predicting avoidant coping strategies compared to engagement coping.

The results from Table 5 provide the mean scores and standard deviations for parental bonding (both MF and FF) across different attachment styles: Secure, Preoccupied, Dismissive, and Fearful. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) results reveal the following: Parental Bonding (MF): The mean scores range from 28.3 (Secure) to 29.4 (Dismissive), with no significant differences across attachment styles ($F = 8.84$, $\eta^2 = 0.160$). This indicates that attachment styles do not show significant variability in maternal bonding (MF). Parental Bonding (FF): The mean scores range from 39.0 (Secure) to 40.5 (Preoccupied), with no significant differences found ($F = 8.84$, $\eta^2 = 0.160$). Similar to the findings for MF, no significant effect of attachment style was found on paternal bonding (FF).

The findings from Table 3 reveal that Parental Bonding (MF) and Coping Strategies do not show any significant correlation. This suggests that, in this sample, maternal bonding is not meaningfully associated with the coping mechanisms employed by young adults. This lack of correlation challenges the hypothesis that parental bonding would be associated with coping strategies, and it indicates that other factors may be influencing how individuals cope with stress, beyond parental bonding alone. Similarly, Parental Bonding (FF) and Coping Strategies suggests that paternal bonding is not significantly related to the coping strategies used by young adults [1] [9].

In the context of the theoretical framework, the lack of correlation between Parental Bonding and Coping Strategies invites further investigation into other potential mediators or moderators of this relationship, such as individual personality traits or external stressors. The findings suggest that coping strategies may be shaped by a combination of factors beyond Parental bonding, and underscore the need for comprehensive models that consider the individual roles of both parents in the emotional and psychological development of young adults.

The findings from the ANOVA suggest that while attachment styles do influence coping strategies, the effect is more pronounced in disengagement coping compared to engagement coping. The lack of significant differences in engagement coping between attachment styles indicates that attachment patterns have a relatively minor influence on the way individuals engage with stress. However, the significant differences in disengagement coping reveal that attachment styles, particularly preoccupied attachment, strongly affect how individuals avoid stress or emotionally disengage. This aligns with attachment theory, where preoccupied individuals, who tend to have negative self-views and use hyperactivating strategies, may oscillate between seeking closeness and avoiding distress, leading to more maladaptive coping behaviors [6] [7] [8].

The study also provides partial support for Hypothesis 3, which proposed that attachment styles would be associated with coping strategies. Securely attached individuals exhibited more balanced coping patterns, as evidenced by their lower disengagement coping scores, suggesting that secure attachment may promote more adaptive stress management strategies. This finding aligns with existing literature that suggests securely attached individuals tend to employ more functional coping strategies when dealing with stress.

These results align with prior research indicating that securely attached individuals tend to employ more adaptive coping strategies, such as problem-solving and seeking social support, while insecure attachment styles—particularly fearful attachment—are linked to avoidance and emotional disengagement. Studies by Mikulincer & Shaver (2007) and Bartholomew & Horowitz (1991) have shown that preoccupied and fearful-avoidant individuals are more likely to rely on maladaptive coping mechanisms, such as rumination and emotional suppression, compared to their securely attached counterparts [6] [7]. The lack of significant differences in Parental Bonding (MF) and Parental Bonding (FF) across attachment styles, as shown by the ANOVA results, suggests that attachment patterns (secure, preoccupied, dismissive, and fearful) do not significantly influence the perceived levels of parental bonding from either mother (MF)

or father (FF). Both maternal and paternal bonding scores are relatively consistent across different attachment groups, with all groups showing similar mean scores (ranging from 28.3 to 29.4 for MF and 39.0 to 40.5 for FF).

These results reject the Hypothesis 2 that, Parental bonding is associated with attachment styles in Young Adults in India. The absence of significant differences suggests that other factors—potentially cultural, familial, or individual experiences—might play a more prominent role in shaping parental bonding perceptions, rather than attachment style alone [13] [14].

However, the moderate effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.160$) indicates that although the results were not statistically significant, attachment style might still account for a small portion of the variance in parental bonding. The absence of strong associations between attachment styles and parental bonding in this sample could be influenced by other moderating factors, such as the quality of the parent-child relationship or broader socio-cultural influences.

In the context of the theoretical framework, these findings suggest that the relationship between attachment styles and parental bonding may not be as straightforward as initially expected. While attachment theory posits that attachment patterns formed in early life influence relational dynamics, including bonding with parents, the results imply that attachment styles may have a less direct effect on perceptions of parental bonding than anticipated.

4. Conclusion

This study examined the relationships between parental bonding, attachment styles, and coping strategies among young adults. The findings reveal several insights into how these variables interact within this population.

Firstly, no significant correlation was found between parental bonding and coping strategies, indicating that parental bonding does not directly influence how young adults cope with stress. This suggests that while parental bonding is a foundational element in early life, it may not directly impact the specific coping strategies used in young adulthood.

However, attachment style showed a significant difference on coping strategies, particularly on disengagement coping. Individuals with a preoccupied attachment style were more inclined toward disengagement coping strategies, while securely attached individuals demonstrated more balanced and adaptive coping strategies. This finding underscores the importance of attachment style in shaping coping mechanisms, suggesting that young adults' responses to stress are influenced more by their attachment orientation than by perceived parental bonding.

Additionally, the ANOVA results showed that parental bonding, whether with mothers (MF) or fathers (FF), did not vary significantly across different attachment styles. This indicates that perceptions of parental bonding are not associated with attachment styles among young adults in India.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Statement of ethical approval

The study strictly followed established ethical guidelines to ensure the rights and well-being of all participants. Informed consent was obtained from each participant, ensuring that they are fully aware of the study's purpose, procedures, and any potential risks involved before they agree to take part. Confidentiality and anonymity were upheld throughout the research process; participants' personal information was protected and not disclosed in any published findings or discussions. Additionally, participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time, without any repercussions. All data collected was securely stored and strictly used for research purposes only, maintaining the integrity and confidentiality of participant information.

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