

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Examination of the Relationship Between Early Maladaptive Schemas, Attachment Styles and Adult Separation Anxiety in a non-Clinical Sample

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## ABSTRACT

Early maladaptive schemas are based on belief mechanisms that are shaped in the childhood of individuals and manifest in relationships in their future lives. These schemas consist of 5 domains and 18 sub-dimensions also affect the way people perceive others. Another factor that predicts relationships in adulthood is the quality of the attachment established with the caregiver in early life. Attachment types seen in adults are examined under 4 main headings. The aim of this study is to determine the level and existence of the correlation between early maladaptive schemas and attachment styles of individuals and their perceived separation anxiety in adulthood, using the correlational survey model. The scales used were, Personal Information Form, Young Schema Questionnaire, Adult Attachment Scale, and Adult Separation Anxiety Questionnaire. 285 individuals, 148 women and 137 men, over the age of 18 and residing in İstanbul, participated in the study. According to the findings of the study, there is a positive correlation between the Fearful, Preoccupied and Dismissive Attachment subscale scores and the Adult Separation Anxiety Scale scores, and there is a negative significant relationship with the Secure Attachment subscale overall score. It is seen that the sub-dimensions of the Young Schema Questionnaire significantly predict separation anxiety in adults. On the other hand, it was found that the Young Schema Scale sub-dimensions were positively correlated with the scores of other attachment styles, except for secure attachment. The obtained results support previous studies.

## INTRODUCTION

People unconsciously develop belief mechanisms about relationships (Güler, 2022a). This belief mechanism is formed by the communication that the person has established with the people s/he has been in a relationship with since his/her infancy. When we look at this mechanism, the existence and effect of schemas in social life can be seen. With the formation of this belief mechanism, people tend to perceive the individuals they are in contact with in their adult lives in this direction. This is also an indicator of the schema (Roediger, 2009).

The concept of early maladaptive schemas states that events experienced in the past years have an impact on current behaviors and therefore disrupt future years. According to schema theory, maladaptive caregiver attitudes cause schema formation (Güler ve Yüksel, 2021). With the understanding of this relationship by the clients, they are being ready in less time to abandon their automatic behavior patterns and exhibit harmonious behaviors under cognitive management. Early maladaptive schemas appear more in relationships. These schemas are life patterns that influence thought, emotion, behavior, communication, and social perceptions (Güler, 2022b).

Early maladaptive schemas consist of five domains. These schema areas are: disconnection and rejection, impaired limits, impaired autonomy and performance, overvigilance and inhibition, other-directedness. There are 18 schema dimensions under these domains. These dimensions are; abandonment/instability, suppressing emotions, mistrust/abuse, social isolation/alienation, defectiveness/shame, dependence/incompetence, enmeshment/undeveloped self, vulnerability to harm or illness, failure to achieve, entitlement/grandiosity, insufficient self-control/self discipline, subjugation, self

sacrifice, approval-seeking/recognition-seeking, emotional deprivation, negativity/pessimism, punitiveness, unrelenting standards/hypercriticalness (Piaget, 1952).

Attachment is the first bond that develops the sense of trust that a baby establishes with his mother or caregiver. The mother or caregiver plays an important role in attachment (Güler, 2021). The attachment style between the caregiver and the child is also effective in later developmental periods (Thompson, 2006).

Signs of the emergence and development of early maladaptive schemas are sought in adolescence and adulthood. Early life experiences are also evaluated within these periods. The first longitudinal study to examine the link between late adolescence and early childhood maladaptive schema levels shows that people who develop a secure attachment style in childhood get less points than people who develop an anxious/preoccupied attachment style (Simard, 2011). On this subject, Bosmans et al.'s study states that the anxiety level of attachment is related to the other-directedness schema domain, and the avoidant level is related to the impaired autonomy and performance schema domain.

Separation anxiety is closely related to the positive perception of oneself and others and the secure attachment that is directly related to this perception. Individuals who develop an insecure attachment style have difficulty breaking up (Güler, 2021). Aggressive attitudes can be seen in insecurely attached individuals. Others may take shelter in solitude by showing avoidance behavior. All these emotions are negative effects of schemas. Schemas are obstacles to expressing emotions (Güler and Özgörüş, 2021; Güler and Tuncay, 2021a). Childhood traumas can occur when the person is neglected, abused or witnessed a traumatic scenario (Güler & Tuncay, 2021b). Insecure life

events, especially within the family, can trigger separation anxiety. These experiences lead to insecure attachment.

**MATERIAL AND METHODS**

**Model:** This research was prepared in accordance with the correlational survey model. It aims to determine the existence and/or degree of co-variation between two or more variables.

**Participants:** The sample of the research consists of individuals over the age of 18 residing in Istanbul. 285 participants participated in the research. Sample selection was based on simple-random sample selection. Of the participants participating in the research, 148 were women and 137 were men. Written informed consents were obtained from the participants. The scales were made via a Google survey on the internet.

**Measures:**

**Personal Information Form:** The personal information form was prepared by the researcher and includes personal information such as education status and age (Karasar, 2005).

**Young Schema Questionnaire:** Young Schema Questionnaire was developed to determine maladaptive schemas. The original form of this questionnaire consists of 18 schemas and 205 items (Schmidt & Dettman, 1995). Young (1990) developed a short form of this questionnaire containing 75 items. In this study, the 3rd version of the Young Schema Questionnaire (YSQ-SF3) consisting of 90 items was used. Unlike the others, this version also includes pessimism, approval-seeking and punitiveness schemas (Young & Brown, 1990). The validity and reliability of this questionnaire was developed by Sarıtaş (Sarıtaş, 2007). This questionnaire includes 5 schema domains and 18 schema dimensions.

**Adult Attachment Scale:** The scale, developed by Griffin and Bartholomew in 1994, consists of 30 items. The scale includes Hazan and Shaver's (1987) paragraphs on attachment measurement, Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) Relationship Questionnaire and Collins and Reas's (1990) Adult Attachment Scale. Turkish validity and reliability studies were carried out by Sümer and Güngör (Sümer and Güngör, 1999). It was requested from the participants to rate each item on a 7-point scale according to general attitudes in close relationships. These scores evaluate four attachment styles.

**Adult Separation Anxiety Questionnaire:** Manicavasagar et al developed the Adult Separation Anxiety Questionnaire. The questionnaire investigates separation anxiety symptoms in adult life and consists of 27 items. It makes a 4-point Likert-type measurement. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire was made by Müge Alkan in a sample with few participants, but it was not published (Diriöz, 2010).

**RESULT**

According to the Pearson Correlation analysis data used to measure the relationship between the Participants' Relationship Questionnaire and its subscales and Separation Anxiety in Adults;

A negative and significant correlation was found between the Secure Attachment subscale overall score and Adult Separation Anxiety scores.

Table 1: The Relationship Between the "Relationship Questionnaire" and its "Subscale Scores" and the "Adult Separation Anxiety Questionnaire" and its "Subscale Scores"

		"Adult Separation Anxiety"
Secure Attachment	"R"	-,301**
	"p"	0,000
	"N"	285
Fearful Attachment	"r"	,260**
	"p"	0,000
	"N"	285
Preoccupied Attachment	"r"	,325**
	"p"	0,000
	"N"	285
Dismissive Attachment	"r"	,254**
	"p"	0,000
	"N"	285

Table 2: "Young Schema Questionnaire" and Sub-Dimension Scores "Adult Separation Anxiety" and Subscale Scores

		"Adult Separation Anxiety Questionnaire"
"Emotional Deprivation"	"r"	,237**
	"P"	0,000
	"N"	285
"Failure to Achieve"	"r"	,269**
	"P"	0,000
	"N"	285
"Negativity/Pessimism"	"r"	,358**
	"P"	0,000
	"N"	285
"Social Isolation/Alienation"	"r"	,292**
	"P"	0,000
	"N"	285
"Emotional Inhibition"	"r"	,249**
	"P"	0,000
	"N"	285
"Approval-Seeking/Recognition-Seeking"	"r"	,224**
	"P"	0,000
	"N"	285
"Dependence/Incompetence"	"r"	,335**
	"P"	0,000
	"N"	285
"Insufficient Self-Control/Self-Discipline"	"r"	,181**
	"P"	0,002
	"N"	285
"Self-Sacrifice"	"r"	,200**
	"P"	0,001
	"N"	285
"Abandonment/Instability"	"r"	,412**
	"P"	0,000
	"N"	285
"Punitiveness"	"r"	,203**
	"P"	0,001
	"N"	285
"Defectiveness/Shame"	"r"	,297**
	"P"	0,000
	"N"	285
"Vulnerability to Harm or Illness"	"r"	,322**
	"P"	0,000
	"N"	285
"Unrelenting Standards"	"r"	,271**
	"P"	0,000
	"N"	285

There is a positive correlation between the Fearful Attachment, Preoccupied Attachment, and Dismissive Attachment subscale scores and the Adult Separation Anxiety Questionnaire scores.

According to the Pearson Correlation used to measure the relationship between the participants' "Young Schema Questionnaire " and its Subscales and "Separation Anxiety in Adults";

There is a positive correlation between the overall score of Emotional Deprivation, Failure to Achieve,

Negativity/Pessimism, Social Isolation/Alienation, Emotional Inhibition, Approval-Seeking/Recognition-Seeking, Dependence/Incompetence, Insufficient Self-Control/Self-Discipline, Self-Sacrifice, Abandonment/Instability, Punitiveness, Defectiveness/Shame, Vulnerability to Harm or Illness, and Unrelenting Standards Subscales scores, and Adult Separation Anxiety scores.

Table 3: Young Schema Questionnaire and Subscale Scores and Relationship Questionnaire and Subscales

		Secure Attachment	Fearful Attachment	Preoccupied Attachment	Dismissive Attachment
"Emotional Deprivation"	"r"	-,120*	,139*	,130*	,307**
	"P"	0,043	0,019	0,028	0,000
	"N"	285	285	285	285
"Failure to Achieve"	"r"	-,163**	,133*	,124*	,232**
	"P"	0,006	0,025	0,036	0,000
	"N"	285	285	285	285
"Negativity/Pessimism"	"r"	-0,055	,330**	,304**	,411**
	"P"	0,357	0,000	0,000	0,000
	"N"	285	285	285	285
"Social Isolation/Alienation"	"r"	-0,106	,270**	,298**	,531**
	"P"	0,074	0,000	0,000	0,000
	"N"	285	285	285	285
"Emotional Inhibition"	"r"	-,274**	,297**	,227**	,357**
	"P"	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000
	"N"	285	285	285	285
"Approval-Seeking/Recognition-Seeking"	"r"	-,127*	,290**	,192**	,281**
	"P"	0,032	0,000	0,001	0,000
	"N"	285	285	285	285
"Dependence/Incompetence"	"r"	-,128*	,200**	,159**	,335**
	"P"	0,031	0,001	0,007	0,000
	"N"	285	285	285	285
"Insufficient Self-Control/Self-Discipline"	"r"	0,033	,175**	,228**	,282**
	"P"	0,576	0,003	0,000	0,000
	"N"	285	285	285	285
"Self-Sacrifice"	"r"	-0,006	,241**	,268**	,344**
	"P"	0,919	0,000	0,000	0,000
	"N"	285	285	285	285
"Abandonment/Instability"	"r"	-,148*	,222**	,195**	,318**
	"P"	0,012	0,000	0,001	0,000
	"N"	285	285	285	285
"Punitiveness"	"r"	0,006	,278**	,307**	,419**
	"P"	0,915	0,000	0,000	0,000
	"N"	285	285	285	285
"Defectiveness/Shame"	"r"	-,177**	0,042	,158**	,221**
	"P"	0,003	0,480	0,007	0,000
	"N"	285	285	285	285
"Vulnerability to Harm or Illness"	"r"	-0,072	,226**	,156**	,348**
	"P"	0,223	0,000	0,008	0,000
	"N"	285	285	285	285
"Unrelenting Standards"	"r"	-0,019	,298**	,265**	,365**
	"P"	0,747	0,000	0,000	0,000
	"N"	285	285	285	285

According to the Pearson Correlation used to measure the relationship between the Young Schema subscales of the participants and Separation Anxiety in Adults;

There is a negative correlation between the Emotional Deprivation, Failure to Achieve, Emotion Inhibition, Approval Seeking/Recognition Seeking, Dependence/Incompetence, Abandonment/Instability, and

Defectiveness/Shame subscale scores and Secure Attachment scores.

Emotional Deprivation, Failure to Achieve, Negativity/Pessimism, Social Isolation/Alienation, Emotion Inhibition, Approval-Seeking/Recognition Seeking, Dependence/Incompetence, Insufficient Self-Control/Self-Discipline, Self-Sacrifice, Abandonment/Instability, Punitiveness, Vulnerability to Harm or Illness, Unrelenting

Standards subscale general score and Fearful Attachment scores are positively related.

There is a positive correlation between the general score of Emotional Deprivation, Failure to Achieve, Negativity/Pessimism, Social Isolation/Alienation, Emotion Inhibition, Approval-Seeking/Recognition Seeking, Dependence/Incompetence, Insufficient Self-Control/Self-Discipline, Self-Sacrifice, Abandonment/Instability, Punitiveness, Defectiveness/Shame, Vulnerability to Harm or Illness, and Unrelenting Standards subscale, and Preoccupied Attachment scores.

There is a positive correlation between the general score of Emotional Deprivation, Failure to Achieve, Negativity/Pessimism, Social Isolation/Alienation, Emotion Inhibition, Approval-Seeking/Recognition Seeking, Dependence/Incompetence, Insufficient Self-Control/Self-Discipline, Self-Sacrifice, Abandonment/Instability, Punitiveness, Defectiveness/Shame, Vulnerability to Harm or Illness, and Unrelenting Standards subscale, and Dismissive Attachment scores.

Table 4: The Effects of "Young Schema Questionnaire" on "Separation Anxiety" in Adults

	B	Standart Error	Beta	T	P	R2	F
(Invariant)	0,481	0,100		4,788	0,000	0,179	5,410
Emotional Deprivation	-0,111	0,047	-0,254	-2,354	0,019		
Failure to Achieve	-0,085	0,060	-0,174	-1,424	0,156		
Negativity/Pessimism	0,053	0,043	0,125	1,218	0,224		
Social Isolation/Alienation	-0,005	0,054	-0,011	-0,095	0,925		
Emotional Inhibition	-0,013	0,042	-0,025	-0,302	0,763		
Approval-Seeking/Recognition-Seeking	-0,002	0,039	-0,005	-0,058	0,954		
Dependence/ Incompetence	0,036	0,059	0,071	0,598	0,550		
Insufficient Self-Control/ Self-Discipline	0,030	0,035	0,065	0,864	0,388		
Self-Sacrifice	-0,021	0,039	-0,047	-0,550	0,583		
Abandonment/ Instability	0,238	0,057	0,491	4,167	0,000		
Punitiveness	-0,013	0,041	-0,027	-0,311	0,756		
Defectiveness/ Shame	0,009	0,057	0,020	0,159	0,874		
Vulnerability to Harm or Illness	0,068	0,050	0,152	1,357	0,176		
Unrelenting Standards	0,020	0,031	0,051	0,631	0,529		

Abandonment/Instability, Defectiveness/Shame, Emotional Deprivation, Negativity/Pessimism, Emotional Inhibition, Failure to Achieve, Vulnerability to Harm or Illness, Insufficient Self-Control/Self-Discipline, Approval seeking/Recognition-Seeking, Social Isolation/Alienation, Unrelenting Standards, Self-Sacrifice, Dependence/Incompetence, Punitiveness, which are sub-dimensions of Young Schema Questionnaire, significantly predicted separation anxiety in adults. ( $R^2=.179$ ,  $p<.0.01$ ).

These variables describe approximately 18% of the total variance in anxiety for adults. According to the beta coefficient, the potency is in the form of Abandonment/Instability, Defectiveness/Shame, Emotional Deprivation, Negativity/Pessimism, Emotional Inhibition, Failure to Achieve, Vulnerability to Harm or Illness, Insufficient Self-Control/Self-Discipline, Approval seeking/Recognition-Seeking, Social Isolation/Alienation, Unrelenting Standards, Self-Sacrifice, Dependence/Incompetence, Punitiveness. When the t-test results regarding the significance of the regression coefficients are analyzed, it is seen that Abandonment/Instability is a significant predictor of anxiety in adults. Other variables have no statistically significant effect.

## DISCUSSION

Considering the results obtained in this study, it was seen that there was a negative and low-level significant relationship between secure attachment and separation anxiety in adults. When a secure and supportive bond is

established with the mother or primary caregiver in childhood, a secure attachment can be established in adulthood. We can say that individuals who establish secure attachment experience less separation anxiety. Because when these individuals are separated from the people they care about, they do not have the thought of losing them or not seeing them again. Individuals who cannot establish a secure attachment with their caregivers may experience problems in establishing, ending or maintaining relationships in their adult lives. This situation, to which the Abandonment/Instability schema also contributes, causes people to maintain insecure attachment styles in their social lives and to experience separation anxiety in a much more destructive way during their adulthood.

Yıldız (2008), in which he investigated the relationship between attachment styles and separation anxiety, shows that there is a significant relationship between secure attachment, fearful attachment and preoccupied attachment. and the quality of care given by parents to their children are also effective in the intensity of separation anxiety. In her study, Küçüköyük (2015), also found that there is a significant relationship between attachment styles and separation anxiety.

Fearful attachment, preoccupied attachment, and dismissive attachment sub-dimensions were found to be positively correlated with low level of separation anxiety in adults. Separation anxiety can be briefly defined as the fear experienced as a result of the person's thoughts of losing or being away from important people or home. In

separation anxiety, individuals may experience intense uneasiness, anger and fear. In order to abandon these intense feelings, they feel the need to constantly show over concern for these people. As a result, separation anxiety of people with fearful attachment, preoccupied and dismissive attachment increases. Neglect or excessive control behaviors of parents during childhood may cause individuals to develop fearful attachment in adulthood. In the studies, the unpredictability of such negative upbringing attitudes or the lack of control over their own life were found to be one of the factors that cause anxiety. (Chorot et al., 2017) Although there is a sense of Defectiveness/Shame on the basis of fearful or preoccupied attachment, there are clear differences in the behavior patterns of the two. In this context, it is seen that attitudes are shaped by perceptions of others; while those with fearful attachment perceive others negatively, people with preoccupied attachment think positively about other people, but they generally have negative perceptions when it comes to themselves. As a result, other directedness increases and it can be thought that separation anxiety will also increase compatibly.

According to the results, it is understood that there is a positive and significant relationship between the separation anxiety of the participants and the emotional deprivation sub-dimension. The bond established between the child and the parents or the primary caregiver also shows its effect in the adult life of the child. The absence or lack of love, attachment and trust in this relationship creates the perception that the child will not be loved when he grows up (Young, 2003). As a result, people may experience separation anxiety.

There is a positive and low-level significant relationship between Separation Anxiety and Failure to Achieve Sub-Dimension in adults. Families who adopt a critical attitude and are too controlling towards their children may create a perception of failure in the child (Erözkan, 2012). Individuals with a perception of failure may break the relationships, and as a result, they may experience separation anxiety.

There is a positive and low-level significant relationship between Negativity/Pessimism Sub-Dimension and Separation Anxiety in Adults. Considering the pessimism sub-dimension, it is seen that the decisions taken in childhood and the control over of emotions are important. Protective behaviors of parents are also effective in this formation and it is seen that these trigger anxiety (Hastings, 2007).

When the relationship between Social Isolation sub-dimensions and Separation Anxiety in Adults was examined, a positive and significant relationship was observed.

It was also found that there was a low-level significant positive correlation with the Approval Seeking/Recognition Seeking schema. In this schema, people value the approval of those they care about. It can be said that they live for their approval. They believe that in the absence of this approval, negative things will happen to them (Karataş & Baki, 2017).

Previous studies and the findings of this study support each other. Early maladaptive schemas, the foundations of which were laid in childhood, also show their effects in

adulthood. When individuals leave people or places they care about, their reactions can be extreme and early maladaptive schemas can be triggered. However, when the studies are examined, it is seen that there are not enough studies. Conducting different studies will help to understand the relationship between separation anxiety and early maladaptive schemas.

When the results of the study are examined, it is understood that there is a negative relationship between the sub-dimensions of Failure to Achieve, Emotional Inhibition, Emotional Deprivation, Abandonment/Instability and Defectiveness/Shame and secure attachment. People with secure attachment are open to expressing their feelings and thoughts. Therefore, they are less afraid of being abandoned by the people they care about. These people are more successful in establishing long-lasting relationships (Solmuş, 2002). In the study conducted by Shaver and o Mikulincer (2018), it was found that; Insecurely attached individuals feel inadequate and indecisive in the face of stressful situations and have difficulty in regulating their emotions, however, individuals with separation anxiety can also be observed to share and express their negative emotions excessively with the desire for closeness and support. This situation can be interpreted as an overcompensation of the "Emotional Inhibition" sub-dimension.

There is a low level of positive correlation between fearful attachment and Emotional Inhibition, Vulnerability to Harm or Illness, Abandonment/Instability, Emotional Deprivation, Dependence/Incompetence, Social Isolation/Alienation, Negativity/Pessimism, Approval Seeking/Recognition Seeking, Insufficient Self-Control/Self-Discipline, Self-Sacrifice, Punitiveness, and Unrelenting Standards. According to the findings of a study in which Deniz (2006) investigated the relationship between attachment styles and child abuse in adolescents, there is a positive relationship between the feelings of guilt and shame in adolescents and fearful attachment.

A positive and low correlation was found between the sub-dimensions of preoccupied attachment and the sub-dimensions of Negativity/Pessimism, Failure to Achieve, Abandonment/Instability, Approval Seeking/Recognition Seeking, Defectiveness/Shame, Social Isolation/Alienation, Vulnerability to Harm or Illness, and Unrelenting standards. An example of obsessive attachment is the internalization of one's relationship with another person and constantly thinking about this relationship. Snell and Finney (2002) found in their research that people who are obsessively attached have negative thoughts about their own relationships. The results of this study also support the studies carried out.

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