

# Attachment to Parents and Resilience Among High School Students

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships between attachment to parents and resilience of adolescents in a Turkish sample of high school students, which consisted of 451 volunteers (252 females and 199 males), ranging in age from 15 to 19 years. To collect information about research variables, 'Short Form of Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment' and 'Child and Youth Resilience Measure' were used. The analysis was conducted in two steps. In the first step, descriptive statistics and correlations between variables were calculated; in the second step, stepwise multiple regression analysis was conducted to estimate the relative contributions of the attachment to parents as predictor variables to the variance in resilience. One of the major findings of this study is that significant positive relationships exist between the attachment to mother and father and resilience. Another major finding of this study is that both attachment to mother and father significantly contributed to the variance in resilience and attachment to mother has the highest contribution to resilience.

## Keywords.

Parental attachment, attachment to mother, attachment to father, resilience.

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Attachment theory highlights the primary role of relationships in human development. The concept of attachment was proposed by Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980) to describe the fundamental bond between parent and infant that is essential to survival and development. During infancy and childhood, bonds are with parents who are looked to for protection, comfort, and support (Bowlby, 1988). Bowlby (1969) described attachment as a motivational and behavioral system that directs the child to seek proximity with a familiar caregiver in stressful situations, with the expectation of receiving protection and emotional support (Bowlby, 1969). While especially evident during early childhood, attachment behavior is characteristic of human beings from “the cradle to the grave” (Bowlby, 1977:203).

The concept of attachment figure has a specific meaning in attachment theory. Attachment figures are not just close, important relationship partners; also they are special individuals to whom a person turns when protection and support are needed (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). According to Bowlby (1969), mothers typically fulfill the role of primary attachment figure during childhood, but secure base relationships might be constructed effectively with any person who is emotionally available and responsive. Fathers, familiar relatives and caregivers could be attachment figures. Throughout life the availability of a responsive attachment figure remains the source of a person's feeling secure (Bowlby, 1988).

Over the past two decades, researchers have explored associations between quality of attachment and later psychosocial functioning. In many studies attachment security has been shown to be associated with various negative outcomes including the poor problem solving and coping skills (Armsden, 1986; Birnbaum et al., 1997; Davila et al., 1996; Howard & Medway, 2004; Kotler et al., 1994; Voss, 1999;), low levels of self-esteem (Arbona & Power, 2003; Armitage & Harris, 2006; Cassidy, 1988; Collins & Read, 1990; Emmanuelle, 2009; Foster et al., 2007; Gomez & McLaren, 2007; Laible et al., 2004; Mickelson et al., 1997; Ooi et al., 2006; Papini & Roggman, 1992; Paterson et al., 1994; Wilkinson, 2004; Wu, 2009), psychological well-being (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Erdem & Kabasakal, 2015; Kafetsios & Sideridis, 2006; La Guardia et al., 2000; Lavy & Littman-Ovadia, 2011; Wei et al., 2011), antisocial behavior and aggression (Arbona & Power, 2003; Ooi et al., 2006), physical symptoms (Armitage & Harris, 2006; Kotler et al., 1994), low social support (Armitage & Harris, 2006; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Caspers et al., 2005; Collins & Read, 1990; Moreira et al., 2003; Priel & Shamai, 1995), poor emotional regulation (Armitage & Harris, 2006; Simpson, 1990) and mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, suicidal behaviors (Armsden et al., 1990; Carnelley et al., 1994; Feeney & Ryan, 1994; Kenny & Donaldson, 1991; Lessard & Moretti, 1998; Muris et al., 2001; Papini & Roggman, 1992; Priel & Shamai, 1995; Raja et al., 1992; Troisi et al., 2001; Wallis & Steele, 2001; Wilkinson, 2004). While researches indicate that outcomes are complex and multidetermined, findings generally support the connection between attachment security and characteristics of the resilient individual.

Resilience is generally conceptualized as the ability of an individual to achieve a positive outcome when exposure to negative or risky environments would predict a negative outcome (Rutter, 2007). Masten et al. (1990:426) refer to resilience as the “process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances. Psychological resilience is concerned with behavioral adaptation, usually defined in terms of internal states of well-being or effective functioning in the environment or both”. Many researchers state that secure attachment is a likely protective factor for resilience (Bowlby, 1988; Masten, & Coatsworth, 1998; Rutter, 1985). Resilience has been described as a positive

outcome for secure attachment (Belsky & Fearon, 2002; Karairmak, & Güloğlu, 2014; Kruttschnitt, Ward, & Shelbe, 1987; Marcus & Betzer, 1996; Wyman et al., 1999).

Several family variables that are also conceptualized as source of attachment security and secure base relationship in attachment theory have been identified as important protective factors associated with resilience. Werner and Smith (1982) found that positive parent-child relationships and emotional support provided by other family members demonstrated protective effects. Rutter (1979) found that a good relationship with at least one parent, defined in terms of both the presence of warmth and absence of severe criticism, was protective against risk related to family discord, and he concluded that the protective effect depends more on the quality, strength, and security of the relationship than on the particular person with whom the relationship is formed. Egeland, Carlson, and Sroufe (1993:525) found that “early sensitive and emotionally responsive caregiving was found to promote positive outcomes even when intervening functioning and conditions were poor”. Masten et al. (1990) assert that the most important and consistent protective factor for children under stress is the presence of caring adults during or after major stressors. If children have supportive, involved parents, they are likely to survive even seriously adverse circumstances without being scarred (Masten, 2001).

In summary, attachment viewed as a life-span developmental concept has built upon the foundation of infant and toddler relationships with the mother and father or primary caregiver. The strength of the attachment bonds formed by children affected the quality of the relationships established in adolescent years (Heinzer, 1993), and resilience which has been described as a positive outcome for secure attachment (Belsky & Fearon, 2002). Specifically, therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the relationships between attachment to parents and resilience of adolescents in a Turkish sample of high school students. Although there are many studies examining attachment behaviors during childhood and adulthood, there are relatively few studies about attachment and its relationship with resilience in adolescence, which represents the transition between two periods. In this respect, it is thought that this study will make an important contribution to the field.

## Method

### Participants

The participants consisted of 451 volunteers; 252 females and 199 males. They were high school students living in Turkey, ranging in age from 15 to 19 years (mean = 16.86, SD = 0.60). All participants belonged predominately to middle socio-economic status and lived with both parents. The data were collected in classroom settings with the agreement of the teachers. Students were told that the questionnaires were anonymous and confidential, so they could feel free to respond sincerely to the questions.

### Measures

In this study The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA), Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM), and Personal Information Form developed by the researcher to collect information about demographic variables such as gender and age were used.

*Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment-Short Form (IPPA)*. Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA) was developed by Armsden and Greenberg (1987) based on Bowlby's theoretical formulations. It is designed to assess the affective and cognitive dimensions of relationships and the quality of attachment to parents and peers (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). In this study the 12-item short form of IPPA developed by Raja et al., (1992) was used. The short form of

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IPPA was translated into Turkish by Günaydın et al. (2005). The short form of IPPA consists of three subscales, namely trust, alienation, and communication. Participants rate each item on a seven-point scale separately for both their mothers and their fathers (e.g., “My mother respects my feelings,” “I tell my mother about my problems and troubles,” “I feel angry with my mother”). Thus a separate score of attachment security can be calculated for both the mother and the father by adding up the scores participants receive on the subscales. It was found that trust, communication, and alienation factors of IPPA did not emerge for the Turkish sample and that total scores of mother and father subscales each had high internal consistency and test-retest reliability (Günaydın et al., 2005). Günaydın et al. (2005) found that the internal consistency estimates are .88 for the mother scale and .90 for the father scale, and the test-retest reliabilities are .87 and .88 respectively. In the current study it was found that the internal consistency estimates are .87 for the mother scale and .89 for the father scale. In this study IPPA was used to assess the attachment to parents.

*Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM)*. The short form of the scale, originally composed of 28 items, was developed by Liebenberg, Ungar, and LeBlanc (2013) and has been validated on two distinct groups of youth. The short form of CYRM is a five-point likert-type measurement with 12-item (e.g., “Getting an education is important to me,” “I enjoy my cultural and family traditions,” “My family will stand by me during difficult times”). Higher scores indicate higher levels of resilience. The short form of the scale was translated and adapted into Turkish by Arslan (2015), and the internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be .91. In the current study, the internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be .83. CYRM was used to measure the resilience of adolescents.

## Data Analyses

Analysis was organized in two steps. Before the data analysis, normality, missing values, and outliers were examined. In first step, descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients were examined by using SPSS 22. In second step, stepwise multiple regression analysis was conducted to estimate the relative contributions of the attachment to parents as predictor variables to the variance in resilience.

## Results

The analysis was conducted in two steps. In the first step, descriptive statistics and correlations between variables were calculated; in the second step, stepwise multiple regression analysis was conducted to estimate the relative contributions of the attachment to parents as predictor variables to the variance in resilience. Pearson product-moment correlations were used to determine relationships between the variables, and means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alpha were also calculated for all variables. Skewness and kurtosis values were used to verify the normality assumption. Descriptive statistics and correlations are presented in Table 1. As shown in Table 1, skewness scores ranged from -.548 to -.911, and kurtosis ranged from -.581 to .112. Therefore, skewness and kurtosis were in an acceptable range for a normal distribution (Morgan, Leech, Gloeckner, & Barrett, 2004). Cronbach's alpha ranged from .83 to .89.

The first aim of this research was to find out the relationships between attachment to parents and resilience of adolescents. The statistically significant positive correlations among the variables are presented in Table 1. Both attachment to mother and father correlated with resilience ( $r = 0.602$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ;  $r = 0.531$ ,  $p < 0.01$  respectively). These positive and statistically significant correlations indicate that the more adolescents have secure attachment to mother and father, the more they have resilience

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix of attachment to mother, attachment to father and resilience

Variables	1	2	3	M	Sd	$\alpha$	Skew	Kurt
1. Attachment to mother	1	.54**	.60**	64.64	14.71	.87	-.91	.19
2. Attachment to father	.54**	1	.53**	59.43	17.07	.89	-.54	-.58
3. Resilience	.60**	.53**	1	47.33	7.79	.83	-.62	.11

Note. \*\*Significant ( $p < 0.01$ )

The second aim of this study was to estimate the relative contributions of the attachment to parents as predictor variables to the variance in resilience. To this end, stepwise regression analysis was computed with resilience as the dependent measure and the attachment to mother and attachment to father variables being the predictors as seen in Table 2. Attachment to mother was entered first to find out how much variability it could significantly account for, followed by attachment to father to know if the amount of explained variability would significantly increase when included. As can be seen in Table 2, Step 1, attachment to mother alone accounted for 36% ( $R$ -square = 0.362) of the variance in resilience, the inclusion of attachment to father in Step 2 accounted for 42% ( $R$ -square = 0.421) which resulted in additional 6% of the variance being explained. The standardized  $\beta$  values reveal the decreasing order of the predictors, showing that attachment to mother ( $\beta = 0.44$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) was the best predictor, followed by attachment to father ( $\beta = 0.29$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

**Table 2.** Stepwise regression analysis predicting resilience

	Predictors	SE b	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	t	$p$
Step 1	Attachment to mother	.31	.60**	.36	.36**	15.95	.000
Step 2	Attachment to mother	.23	.44**			10.37	.000
	Attachment to father	.13	.29**	.42	.05**	6.78	.000

Note. \*\*Significant ( $p < .001$ )

## Discussion

This study investigated the attachment to mother and father as predictors of resilience among high school students. One of the major findings of this study is that significant positive relationships exist between the attachment to mother and father and their resilience. The positive correlations between parental attachment and resilience corroborated the earlier reports (Jenkins, 2016; Stacy, 2006; van Ijzendoorn et al., 1991). Research has also indicated a direct association between secure attachment and measures of ego resiliency (Arend, Grove, & Sroufe, 1979; Kobak & Sceery, 1988). Other studies found that attachment security was negatively correlated with resilience (Axford, 2007; Karreman & Vingerhoets, 2012). These findings support the literature that has identified attachment to parents as a major factor in an individual's ability to develop resilience (Kruttschnitt, Ward, & Sheble, 1987; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990).

Another major finding of this study is that both attachment to mother and father significantly contributed to the variance in resilience. Attachment to mother and father jointly contributed 42% of the total variance in resilience. Attachment to mother has the highest

contribution to resilience, followed by attachment to father. According to Bowlby (1988) at least during the early years of an individual's life, the model of self-interacting with mother is more influential than the father. This would hardly be surprising since in many culture children interact far more with the mother than with the father. Two studies of young adults show that the features of personality characteristic of each pattern during the early years are also to be found in young adults (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Kobak & Sceery 1988); and except in cases where family relations have changed substantially in the interval, they have been present continuously. The importance of maternal attachment has been emphasized in many researches on how the influence on personality development of interactions with the mother compares with the influence of those with the father (Allen et al., 2007; Erdem & Kabasakal, 2016; Freitag et al., 1996; Main & Weston, 1981; Main et al., 1985; Suess et al., 1992).

Findings of this research underscore the critical importance of parental attachment through adolescence. The continued importance of adolescent-parent attachment as a determinant of health during adolescence and beyond has been emphasized in many studies. It is essential for mental health and education professionals to be knowledgeable about adolescent development and the value of adolescent-parent attachment. A clear understanding of these concepts may provide a useful framework for the development of intervention strategies to foster resilience in adolescents.

Some limitations are inherent in this study. First, the data was gathered from a relatively small and homogeneous sample, thus limiting the external validity of findings. The present study was limited to data gathered from a single source, high school students as adolescents. Future studies should include individuals in different developmental stages, backgrounds or cultures. Second, a self-report paper-pencil assessment was used to collect data in this study. Self-report assessments are widely used in collecting data on close relationships. There are, however, common problems with the use of such measures including impression management (exaggeration, faking and lying) and self-deception (self-favoring bias, self-enhancement, defensiveness and denial) (Robins, Fraley, & Krueger, 2007). Although the data were tested for reliability and yielded a high Cronbach alpha score, further study is required to investigate the research variables with different research methods in order to develop a more detailed picture of the relationships between variables.

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**Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author(s) declared no conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**Funding**

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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