

Attachment Anxiety and Avoidance in Adolescents and Its Relationship with Social Exclusion

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ABSTRACT: The aim in this study is to examine the relationship with attachment anxiety and avoidance in adolescents and social exclusion. Study group consists of 520 students who have volunteered and been selected randomly with easily accessible case sampling method from ten different schools and are between the ages of 12-15. Experiences in Close Family Relationships Scale and Ostracism for Adolescents (Social Exclusion) Scale have been used for data collection. In the analysis of the data, t-Test, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Pearson Correlation coefficient were used. In the end; it was found that the level of attachment anxiety and avoidance anxiety of female adolescents were higher than males. It was observed that the difference between adolescents' attachment anxiety and avoidance and adolescents' age, number of siblings, age of parents and educational status was not significant. The degree of social exclusion has increased as adolescents' attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance increased or the degree of social exclusion has decreased as adolescents' attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance decreased. In the light of the results, suggestions are presented.

KEYWORDS: Attachment, experiences in close family relationships, social exclusion, adolescence.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is defined as the lifetime between the onset of puberty and adult independence (Patton et al., 2016). Individuals at this stage try to overcome the adolescence and growth process. The body shape of the individual changes, new cognitive abilities that include abstract thinking capability, a sense of personal and sexual identity develop.

Adolescents try to gain independence from their parents emotionally, personally and economically. (Christie & Viner, 2005). At this stage when their social world and communication networks are unstable and changable, adolescents try to establish stronger relationships with their peer groups and they still need to be independent individuals by developing a complete sense of self-respect (Burnett-Heyes et al., 2015). At adolescence stage, changes occur in friendship relationships with the increasing importance of mutual trust and emotional closeness. Friendship relations, sincerity, trust, the importance of unity and emotional support come into prominence (Smollar & Youniss, 1989).

The quality of friendship relationships that occur during adolescence stage is related to the quality of attachment that was established in life's early stages. Attachment theory suggests that individuals create a number of mental representations/internal working models that will form the basis of their lifelong relationships with others through their social interaction with attachment figures. Internal working models affect individual's self-perception, emotions and relationships. Mikulincer & Shaver (2007), It is stated that attachment figures who were accessible and supportive when needed, led to the development of positive and optimistic internal working models. This in the end contributes positively to self-respect, effective psycho-social functionality and mental health. On the other hand, when the attachment figure is not reachable and avoidant when needed, the individual establishes negative mental representations of himself and others. Attachment behaviors come out when individuals are distressed or ill, when they are scared etc. (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998). Ainsworth et al. (1978) classified attachment styles as secure, anxious / unstable or anxious / ambivalent, and avoidant attachment. Individuals with a secure attachment pattern interpret stressful situations or situations in a more realistic and moderate way. They see themselves as capable of dealing with these situations (Collins & Read, 1990). They seek support from important people, they feel less stressed, they adapt better to the situation and they behave more constructively against threats (Kobak & Sceery, 1988). Individuals with insecure attachment patterns in

anxiety and/or avoidance dimensions may distort their views about themselves and others by using defense methods and may experience high levels of negative feelings in threatening situations (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998).

Attachment is a socially oriented survival system. Throughout evolution, it has been claimed that people cope with survival problems by seeking help from others (Ein-Dor, Mikulincer, Doron, & Shaver, 2010). As individuals solve their survival problems in a social context, exclusion mechanism has become a threat to them. The sensitivity to being involved in a group is related to the social connections that occur in early childhood.

According to Riva and Eck (2016) Social exclusion is an all-round situation that includes factors ranging from rejection, exclusion, discrimination to human characteristics and social isolation. Social exclusion is a painful experience that activates brain's physical pain sensory areas (Eisenberger, 2012). Individuals who are exposed to social exclusion feel pain, display aggressive behaviors and they often feel sadness and anger. There are perceptions of danger for emotions of belonging, self-confidence and existence (Williams, 2007b). Social exclusion can occur at work (Ferris, Brown, Berry & Lian, 2008), in the family, at school (Williams, 2007a), in religious groups and or social environments (Nezlek, Wesselmann, Wheeler & Williams, 2012) Williams (2009) argues that individuals who have been excluded display behaviors to strengthen their sense of belonging and self-confidence in order to balance their threatened needs.

Attachment security determines what kind of response individuals will give to social exclusion. Research demonstrates that the individuals with secure attachment style are more likely to seek and use social support when faced with social threats such as divorce and also with non-social threats such as chronic pain (Mikulincer & Florian, 1995). Social exclusion is an interpersonal situation that can increase the feeling of vulnerability in individuals with insecure attachment style. Individuals with anxious attachment style have more negative reactions to exclusion. They are overly sensitive to whether others respond to their needs or not, others' behaviors toward them set the foundation point of their self-respect. (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). This is why they have reactive approaches toward social exclusion. Individuals with avoidant attachment style are also sensitive toward the negative effects of exclusion and they may exhibit reactive behaviors (Carvalho & Gabriel, 2006; MacDonald & Borsook, 2010).

There are a limited number of researches that examine the relationship between attachment and social exclusion. In these studies, the biological aspect of anxious attachment (DeWall et al., 2012), adolescence and attachment process (Keskin & Çam, 2009), attachment and related variables (Morsünbül & Çok, 2011), the meanings given to the states of emotions by individuals with anxious attachment style and who face social exclusion (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2013), the effects of attachment patterns on social exclusion (McDonald & Donnellan, 2012), the behavior of attachment characteristics towards social exclusion (Yaakobi & Williams, 2015) have been investigated. In this study, the aim is to investigate the relationship between attachment anxiety and avoidance in adolescents and social exclusion. In this respect, the following sub-objectives are addressed:

- Is there any difference between adolescents' attachment anxiety scores according gender, age, number of siblings, parent age and education level?
- Is there any difference between adolescents' attachment avoidance scores according gender, age, number of siblings, parent age and education level?
- Is there a significant relationship between attachment anxiety scores of adolescents and social exclusion status?
- Is there a significant relationship between attachment avoidance scores of adolescents and social exclusion status?

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study is designed in relational screening model. In relational screening models, the aim is to determine whether there is a change between two or more variables, and if there is, the degree of this relationship (Karasar, 2005).

Study Group

The study group of this research consists of 520 adolescents who volunteered to participate in the study and continue their education in 10 different secondary education institutions randomly selected with easy sampling method in the city of Karabük in Turkey. 249 of the adolescents are female and 271 are boys, they are aged 12-15; 64 of them are single child, 278 are two siblings, 141 are three siblings and 37 are four or more siblings. 25 adolescents have mothers who are at the age of 30 or under, 145 mothers are between the ages of 31-35, 214 mothers are between the ages of 36-40, 136 of the mothers are 41 and plus; 16 adolescents have fathers who are at the age of 30 or under, 53 fathers are between the ages of 31-35, 206 fathers are between the

ages of 36-40, 245 of the fathers are 41 and plus. Of the adolescents' mothers, 176 are primary school graduates, 130 are secondary school graduates, 137 are high school graduates, 29 are associate degree graduates, and 48 are university graduates; of the adolescents' fathers 82 of them are primary school graduates, 103 are secondary school graduates, 194 are high school graduates, 60 are associate degree graduates and 81 are university graduates.

Data Collection Tools

In the research, Personal Information Form was used to obtain some personal information about adolescents and their families, Experiences in Close Family Relationships Scale to determine adolescents' attachment status, and Ostracism Scale for Adolescents (Social Exclusion) were used to determine adolescents' social exclusion status.

Experiences in Close Family Relationships Scale contains 12 items and two sub-dimensions (Attachment Anxiety, Attachment Avoidance), it has 7 ratings. The validity and reliability studies of the Turkish form were conducted by Akin, Bilgin and Akin (2015). The result of Confirmatory factor analysis demonstrates that the scale has 12 factors and two sub-dimension as in the original form. ($\chi^2= 110,25$, $sd= 44$, $RMSEA= .073$, $CFI=.97$, $GFI=.94$, $AGFI=.89$, $SRMR=.058$). The scale factor loadings are listed between .05 and .86, and the Cronbach Alpha internal consistency reliability coefficient is .91 for the Attachment Anxiety subscale and .69 for the Attachment Avoidance subscale. The scale adjusted item total correlation coefficients are found to be between .25 and .83. In the analysis made with this study group, the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of Close Relationships within the Family was found to be 0.843.

Ostracism Scale for Adolescents (Social Exclusion) has a two sub-dimensional, 11 points, 5 point Likert-type rating for Neglect and Exclusion. The validity and reliability studies of the Turkish form were conducted by Akin, Uysal and Akin (2016). As a result of Confirmatory Factor Analysis run for construct validity, it was found to be two-dimensional as in the original form. ($\chi^2= 80.64$, $sd= 41$, $RMSEA= .056$, $NFI=.96$, $NNFI=.97$, $IFI=.98$, $RFI=.95$, $CFI=.98$, $GFI=.95$ ve $SRMR=.048$). Item factor loads are between .71 and .88, Cronbach Alpha internal consistency reliability coefficients are .93 for the unvalued subscale, .90 for the Exclusion subscale, and .89 for the whole scale. Scale corrected item-test correlations are between .51 and .70. In this study, scale total score is used. In the analyzes made with this study group, the Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient of Social Exclusion Scale was found to be 0.833.

Data Analysis

The data has been entered into the computer environment and normality distributions have been examined. The skewness coefficient of Attachment Anxiety scores is found to be 2.12, the Kurtosis coefficient is 4.11; The skewness coefficient of Avoidance Anxiety is found to be .32, the Kurtosis coefficient is -.34. The relationship of the adolescents' scores between two scales has been examined by correlation analysis. The t-test has been used to examine the difference between Attachment Anxiety and Avoidance according to the gender of adolescents. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) is used to examine the differences between attachment anxiety and avoidance according to the age, number of siblings, parental age and education level of adolescents.

III. DISCUSSION

In the study, it is determined that the difference between the number of siblings, the age of the parents and the education level and attachment status of adolescents was not significant, but the difference between gender and attachment anxiety and avoidance was significant.

It is seen that adolescent girls' levels of attachment anxiety and avoidance anxiety are significantly higher than boys'. The fact that female adolescents have higher levels of attachment anxiety and avoidance than their male peers may be due to the parents' different parenting attitudes according to the gender of children. Especially, parents' more protecting attitude toward female adolescents may result in making them dependent individuals (Günel, 2007). In social relations, the effect of this attitude on girls may manifest itself in the form of anxiety and avoidance. Healthy interaction formed with parents make the foundation of secure attachment. Otherwise, adolescent may think that his independence is being taken away from him by his parents. (Güneş, 2017). Adolescents who are securely attached will find the strength to cope with stressful and threatening situations. (Collins & Read, 1990). The higher levels of attachment anxiety and avoidance of female adolescents may be due to the fact that girls base their self on establishing and maintaining relationships (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998). In the literature there are studies that demonstrate that gender is a variable affecting attachment (Çelebi, 2017; Akbağ & Erdenimamoğlu, 2010) as well as studies that don't find an effect of gender on attachment styles (Sümer & Şendağ, 2009).

Similarly, when we examine the adolescent's age as a factor on attachment, there are studies showing that attachment anxiety increases with the increasing age in the literature (Kırimer et al., 2014), and that the attachment avoidance is intensified in 10-14 ages (Ammaniti et al., 2000). These findings differ from the study findings. In the study, it was determined by Akyıldız (2017) and Kahraman (2015) that adolescents' number of

sibling and by Çetin (2015) - mothers' age don't have a significant difference with their attachment styles, which support the finding about the effect of number of sibling. Unlike the findings regarding the difference between mother's education level and attachment, it was emphasized that mother's education level had an effect on attachment (Çetin, 2015; Yolalan, 2013; İlaslan, 2009) and father's educational level had no effect on adolescent attachment (Demir, 2017).

In the study, it was found that as adolescents' attachment anxiety and avoidance increased, their social exclusion levels increased, or adolescents' attachment anxiety and avoidance decreased, and their social exclusion levels decreased. The latest research reveals that individuals with a secure attachment style have been affected less by negative effects of social exclusion than individuals with an insecure attachment style (Hermann, Skulborstad & Wirth, 2013).

Social exclusion is a type of interpersonal situation that can increase the vulnerability emotion of individuals with insecure attachment style. Individuals with anxious attachment styles have more negative reactions to exclusion. They are overly sensitive to whether others respond to their needs or not, others' behaviors toward them set the foundation point of their self respect. (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). This is why they have reactive approaches toward social exclusion. Individuals with avoidant attachment style are also sensitive toward the negative effects of exclusion and they may exhibit reactive behaviours (Carvallo & Gabriel, 2006; MacDonald & Borsook, 2010).

Using the magnetic resonance imaging technology (fMRI) DeWall and his friends (2012) found that nerves and neurons associated with the distress caused by rejection were activated in anxious attachment. On the contrary, less activity was observed in these regions for avoidant attachment conditions. Shaver and Mikulincer (2013) precipitated on their studies that participants with anxious attachment style who were exposed to social exclusion have low scores of making sense of their emotions.

Findings from these studies indicate that exposure to social exclusion is significantly associated with anxious attachment but not with avoidant attachment pattern. McDonald and Donnellan (2012) stated that attachment patterns don't decrease the negative effects of social exclusion on basic needs. In the study conducted by Yaakobi and Williams (2015), it was found that individuals with avoidant attachment patterns had more reactive behaviors toward social exclusion but no reactive behaviors were seen in individuals with anxious attachment patterns.

It is clear that beginning from the stage of infancy, the development of secure attachment affects individuals' entire life. In the light of the findings and literature, studies can be conducted in order to strengthen social interactions as well as educational activities with adolescents, family members and school staff in the adolescence period. Thus by supporting the secure attachment relationships, social exclusion can be prevented or adolescents can attain the power to cope with negative effects. In the studies that will be conducted, different variables that affect adolescents' attachment styles can be examined; additionally experimental studies that aim to increase secure attachment can be planned and implemented.

IV. FINDINGS

In this section, correlation analysis results between the findings of whether adolescents' attachment anxiety and avoidance scores differ according to gender, age, number of siblings, parental age and educational status and scale scores are given.

Table 1 demonstrates attachment anxiety and avoidance t-Test scores according to the adolescents' gender.

Table 1.
Attachment Anxiety and Avoiding Scores by Gender t-Test Results

| Sub Dimensions | Gender | N | Mean | Sd | t | Sig |
|----------------------|--------|-----|-------|------|-------|-------|
| Attachment Anxiety | Female | 249 | 11.58 | 8.49 | 2.655 | .008* |
| | Erkek | 271 | 9.78 | 6.92 | | |
| Attachment Avoidance | Kız | 249 | 21.17 | 9.43 | 2.507 | .012* |
| | Erkek | 271 | 19.21 | 8.38 | | |

*p< .05

In Table 1 it is demonstrated that there is a significant difference between male and female adolescents' Attachment Anxiety (t(0.05: 518= 2.655) and Attachment Avoidance (t(0.05: 518= 2.507) scores according to the gender (p<.05). Girls' Attachment Anxiety (M=11. 58) and Attachment Avoidance (M=21.17) scores are higher than the mean scores of boys (M=9.78, M=19.21). According to this, it can be said that adolescent girls' levels of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance are significantly higher than boys'.

Table 2 presents the results of adolescents' attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance ANOVA scores according to the age

Table 2.

Attachment Anxiety and Avoiding ANOVA Scores According to the Age

| Sub Dimensions | Age | N | Mean | Sd | F | Sig |
|----------------------|--------|-----|-------|------|------|------|
| Attachment Anxiety | 12 age | 53 | 11.18 | 9.08 | .572 | .633 |
| | 13 age | 218 | 10.12 | 7.13 | | |
| | 14 age | 238 | 10.95 | 8.07 | | |
| | 15 age | 11 | 11.45 | 5.73 | | |
| Attachment Avoidance | 12 age | 53 | 19.69 | 9.67 | .071 | .976 |
| | 13 age | 218 | 20.22 | 8.79 | | |
| | 14 age | 238 | 20.13 | 8.99 | | |
| | 15 age | 11 | 20.81 | 7.98 | | |

According to the Table 2, by adolescents' age there isn't a significant difference between the mean scores of Attachment Anxiety ($F_{3-516}=.572$) and Attachment Avoidance ($F_{3-516}=.071$). ($p>.05$).

Table 3 presents the results of adolescents' attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance ANOVA scores according to the number of siblings

Table 3. Attachment Anxiety and Avoiding ANOVA Scores According to Number of Siblings

| Sub Dimensions | Number of Siblings | N | Mean | Sd | F | Sig |
|----------------------|--------------------|-----|--------|-------|-------|------|
| Attachment Anxiety | Only Child | 64 | 9.301 | 7.615 | .984 | .400 |
| | Two siblings | 278 | 10.973 | 8.179 | | |
| | Three siblings | 141 | 10.384 | 6.312 | | |
| | Four or more | 37 | 11.423 | 9.530 | | |
| Attachment Avoidance | Only Child | 64 | 19.46 | 8.58 | 1.035 | .377 |
| | Two siblings | 278 | 19.99 | 8.78 | | |
| | Three siblings | 141 | 20.12 | 9.30 | | |
| | Four or more | 37 | 22.54 | 9.29 | | |

According to the Table 3, there isn't a significant difference between the mean scores of Attachment Anxiety ($F_{3-516}=.984$) and Attachment Avoidance ($F_{3-516}=1.035$) according to the number of siblings. ($p>.05$).

Table 4 presents the results of adolescents' attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance ANOVA scores according to the age of the mother.

Table 4.

Attachment Anxiety and Avoiding ANOVA Scores According to the Age of the Mother

| Sub Dimensions | Mother Age | N | Mean | Sd. | F | Sig |
|----------------------|------------------|-----|-------|------|-------|------|
| Attachment Anxiety | 30 age and under | 25 | 10.13 | 7.24 | 1.722 | .161 |
| | 31-35 age | 145 | 10.25 | 7.45 | | |
| | 36-40 age | 214 | 11.53 | 8.39 | | |
| | 41 age and up | 136 | 9.74 | 7.03 | | |
| Attachment Avoidance | 30 age and under | 25 | 17.17 | 6.82 | 1.804 | .145 |
| | 31-35 age | 145 | 21.10 | 9.34 | | |
| | 36-40 age | 214 | 20.30 | 8.96 | | |
| | 41 age and up | 136 | 19.43 | 8.71 | | |

According to the Table 4, There isn't a significant difference between the mean scores of Attachment Anxiety ($F_{3-516}=1.722$) and Attachment Avoidance ($F_{3-516}=1.804$) according to the age of the mother. ($p>.05$).

Table 5 presents the results of adolescents' attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance ANOVA scores according to the age of the father.

Table 5.
Attachment Anxiety and Avoiding ANOVA Scores According to the Age of the Father

| Sub Dimensions | Father Age | N | Mean | Sd. | F | Sig |
|----------------------|------------------|-----|-------|------|-------|------|
| Attachment Anxiety | 30 age and under | 16 | 9.49 | 4.96 | 2.296 | .077 |
| | 31-35 age | 53 | 10.05 | 8.00 | | |
| | 36-40 age | 206 | 11.73 | 8.65 | | |
| | 41 age and up | 245 | 9.92 | 6.94 | | |
| Attachment Avoidance | 30 age and under | 16 | 16.01 | 7.08 | 1.547 | .201 |
| | 31-35 age | 53 | 21.02 | 8.66 | | |
| | 36-40 age | 206 | 20.57 | 9.39 | | |
| | 41 age and up | 245 | 19.87 | 8.68 | | |

According to the Table 5, there isn't a significant difference between the mean scores of Attachment Anxiety ($F_{3-516}=2.296$) and Attachment Avoidance ($F_{3-516}=1.547$) according to the age of the father. ($p>.05$). Table 6 presents the results of adolescents' attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance ANOVA scores according to the education level of the mother.

Table 6.
Attachment Anxiety and Avoiding ANOVA Scores According to the Education Level of Mother

| Sub Dimensions | Education Level of Mother | N | Mean | Sd. | F | Sig |
|----------------------|---------------------------|-----|-------|------|-------|------|
| Attachment Anxiety | Primary School | 176 | 11.28 | 8.30 | .578 | .678 |
| | Middle School | 130 | 10.21 | 6.64 | | |
| | High School | 137 | 10.58 | 8.66 | | |
| | Associate | 29 | 10.44 | 7.78 | | |
| | Bachelor | 48 | 9.71 | 5.53 | | |
| Attachment Avoidance | Primary School | 176 | 21.29 | 9.07 | 1.410 | .229 |
| | Middle School | 130 | 19.81 | 9.35 | | |
| | High School | 137 | 19.21 | 8.36 | | |
| | Associate | 29 | 21.03 | 9.69 | | |
| | Bachelor | 48 | 19.00 | 8.27 | | |

According to the Table 6, there isn't a significant difference between the mean scores of Attachment Anxiety ($F_{4-515}=.578$) and Attachment Avoidance ($F_{4-515}=1.410$) according to the education level of mother. ($p>.05$).

Table 7 presents the results of adolescents' attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance ANOVA scores according to the education level of the father.

Table 7.
Attachment Anxiety and Avoiding ANOVA Scores According to the Education Level of Father

| Sub Dimensions | Education Level of Father | N | Mean | Sd. | F | Sig |
|----------------------|---------------------------|-----|-------|-------|-------|------|
| Attachment Anxiety | Primary School | 82 | 11.08 | 8.45 | .375 | .826 |
| | Middle School | 103 | 10.34 | 7.28 | | |
| | High School | 194 | 10.25 | 7.47 | | |
| | Associate | 60 | 11.03 | 7.70 | | |
| | Bachelor | 81 | 11.21 | 8.41 | | |
| Attachment Avoidance | Primary School | 82 | 19.87 | 7.51 | 1.589 | .176 |
| | Middle School | 103 | 20.69 | 10.06 | | |
| | High School | 194 | 19.81 | 8.45 | | |
| | Associate | 60 | 22.42 | 9.53 | | |
| | Bachelor | 81 | 18.84 | 9.30 | | |

According to the Table 7, there isn't a significant difference between the mean scores of Attachment Anxiety ($F_{4-515}=.375$) and Attachment Avoidance ($F_{4-515}=1.589$) according to the education level of father. ($p>.05$).

In Table 8, correlation analysis results related to the relationship between adolescents' attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance and Social Exclusion Scale scores are demonstrated.

Table 8. Correlation Analysis Results of Attachment Anxiety and Avoidance and Social Exclusion Scale

| Variables | Attachment Anxiety | Attachment Avoidance | Social Exclusion Scale |
|---------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Attachment Anxiety | 1.00 | | |
| 2. Attachment Avoidance | .36** | 1.00 | |
| 3. Social Exclusion Scale | .37** | .32** | 1.00 |

**p<.01

When Table 8 is examined, it is seen that adolescents' Experiences in Close Family Relationships Scale Attachment Anxiety ($r = .37, p <.01$) and Attachment Avoidance ($r = .32, p <.01$) subscale scores are moderately positively correlated with Social Exclusion Scale scores. According to this, as attachment anxiety increases, social exclusion levels increase or as social exclusion levels increase, attachment anxiety also increases. In addition, as attachment avoidance increases, social exclusion levels increase, or as social exclusion levels increase, attachment avoidance increases. It is also observed that there is a significant relationship between attachment avoidance and attachment avoidance scores. As attachment avoidance increases, attachment anxiety increases or as attachment avoidance decreases, attachment anxiety decreases.

V. CONCLUSION

According to the results obtained from the study the level of attachment anxiety and avoidance anxiety of female adolescents were higher than males. It was observed that the difference between adolescents' attachment anxiety and avoidance and adolescents' age, number of siblings, age of parents and educational status was not significant. The degree of social exclusion has increased as adolescents' attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance increased or the degree of social exclusion has decreased as adolescents' attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance decreased.

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