Prediction and Explanation of the Sense of Happiness and Hope for the Future Based on Parental Attachment Styles

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of this study was to predict and explain happiness and hope for the future based on parental attachment styles among female university students.

Methods and Materials: This research was conducted using a descriptive-analytical and correlational design with a predictive approach. The statistical population included all female students of the Islamic Azad University, Garmsar Branch, during the academic year 2022–2023. A total of 274 students were selected using stratified and purposive sampling methods based on specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. Data were collected using the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire, Snyder's Hope Scale, and Hazan and Shaver's Adult Attachment Style Questionnaire. After obtaining informed consent, the data were analyzed through Pearson correlation, multiple regression, and path analysis using SPSS and AMOS software. Statistical significance was set at p < .05.

Findings: The results showed that secure attachment style significantly and positively predicted both happiness ($\beta = .38$, $p < .01$; $R^2 = .24$) and hope for the future ($\beta = .44$, $p < .01$; $R^2 = .31$). Avoidant attachment style was a significant negative predictor of happiness ($\beta = -.29$, $p < .01$) and had a weaker, yet still significant, inverse relationship with hope for the future ($\beta = -.11$, $p < .01$). Ambivalent attachment style negatively and significantly predicted both happiness ($\beta = -.17$, $p < .01$) and hope for the future ($\beta = -.30$, $p < .01$). All regression models met the assumptions of normality, linearity, and independence of residuals.

Conclusion: The findings suggest that parental attachment styles, particularly secure attachment, play a meaningful role in promoting positive psychological outcomes such as happiness and hope in emerging adults. Insecure attachment styles, including avoidant and ambivalent, are associated with diminished emotional well-being.

Keywords: Happiness, Hope for the Future, Parental Attachment Styles, Secure Attachment, Insecure Attachment, Female Students.

1. Introduction

The contemporary world is one of technology and information, and despite its numerous benefits brought about by increased communication, the expansion of networks, and the flourishing of life opportunities, it has also become intertwined with loneliness and widening interpersonal distances. This shift has led to widespread psychosocial problems such as isolation, depression, anxiety, suicide, divorce, and a tendency toward delinquency. The emergence of such issues has resulted in a decline in individuals' happiness and an increased tendency toward social withdrawal. Happiness can be considered one of the foundational concepts in psychological sciences and a significant factor influencing human behavior. What currently draws the attention of positive psychologists is the presence of positive emotions such as happiness {Alkire, 2020 #174522}{Okur, 2025 #158796}.

Among the most essential psychological needs of individuals is the need for joy and happiness, and given the profound effects it has on the formation and development of personality, it has always occupied the human mind. Regardless of how happiness is achieved, its presence in individuals leads to improved mental and physical health. Those who possess internal joy and happiness feel more secure, make decisions more easily, are more collaborative, and foster greater satisfaction in the lives of those around them {Eshagh Neymvari, 2023 #169481;Ying, 2024 #131862}. Therefore, happiness can be seen both as a valuable life goal and a determinant influencing other aspects of life {Chakhssi, 2018 #174544}.

Happiness is a subject of ongoing interest and significance, particularly for researchers and psychologists, leading to extensive studies on the topic {Van Woudenberg, 2020 #174545}{Ramos, 2022 #174540;Safaria, 2020 #174551}. According to prominent psychological theories and their definitions, happiness can be described as the amount of positive value an individual attributes to oneself {Argyle, 2013 #174550}. Happiness consists of two aspects: one emotional, which reflects the experience of joy, satisfaction, euphoria, contentment, and other positive emotions; and one cognitive, which entails the evaluation of satisfaction across various life domains, indicating psychological well-being, mental health, and happiness. Happiness cannot be defined as the mere absence of depression, but rather as the presence of a significant number of emotional, cognitive, and affective positive states {Quoidbach, 2015 #174539}.

On the other hand, in today's era—coinciding with technological development and people's growing inclination toward mechanized lifestyles—youth are facing unique circumstances that distinguish them from previous generations. In this era, young people are confronted with numerous challenges such as population growth, increased age of marriage, insufficient job opportunities, mismatch between education and employment, moral crises, and social corruption. These issues have led to the disorientation of millions of young people in society, making the pursuit of a decent life, employment, housing, marriage, and other life goals increasingly difficult. Many youths, in their pursuit of long-term goals, focus primarily on overcoming university entrance exams and gaining academic admission {Griggs, 2017 #174548}. These obstacles and existing barriers make the future seem ambiguous for many students, rendering it difficult for them to visualize a clear path ahead. The absence of defined and predetermined goals leads these individuals to engage in constant daydreaming, becoming immersed in confusion and disorientation. Furthermore, these conditions cause young people to become unmotivated and disorganized, frequently expressing dissatisfaction with every matter. Such conditions lay the groundwork for the emergence of numerous psychological and emotional problems. In light of their inability to achieve their goals, their level of hope for the future diminishes. From this perspective, having hope for the future is crucial, as it provides individuals with strong motivation in their decision-making {Shimshock, 2022 #174542}.

Accordingly, hope can be defined as a psychological state that encourages individuals to act and engage in activities. Naturally, the incentive behind performing tasks is the hope for a return—whether material or spiritual. In essence, fear and desire are the driving forces behind human behavior, directly influencing effort and behavior {Safarishali, 2018 #174534}. Hope is a complex concept that was first investigated scientifically in the late 1960s and gradually became a topic of psychological inquiry, marking the beginning of a new era in theory development. For several decades, health professionals and psychologists have studied the concept of hope. In this context, hope is considered a key to successful psychotherapy and the foundation of certain therapeutic approaches {Ciarrochi, 2015 #174541}. Hope can be seen as a source of all personal growth and development, with hope for the future being one of the most fundamental human needs. A hopeless individual cannot effectively pursue personal or social goals. The concept of hope and its outcomes are vital to both physical and mental

health, since the achievement of goals, plans, and dreams is situated in the future. Therefore, individuals' perspectives on their own futures are key motivational factors for lifelong growth and development {Safarishali, 2018 #174534}.

Based on prior research, attachment styles have significant direct and indirect effects on happiness {Momeni, 2022 #174543} and hope for the future {Sadeghi, 2015 #174533}. The family can be considered the primary system influencing a child's hope and happiness. Essentially, family communication schemas or patterns represent a scientific construct based on the observable dynamics within the family—defined by the nature of member interactions, the conversations they engage in, and the mutual perception of these interactions {Fitzpatrick, 2004 #174526}. A child's emotional development is formed through reciprocal interactions with parents, and these interactions remain relevant throughout life {Momeni, 2008 #174530}. Therefore, parental attachment styles can profoundly and significantly influence children.

The attachment style model was first introduced by Bowlby. Later, in 1987, Hazan and Shaver described three attachment styles: avoidant, ambivalent, and secure. According to their perspective, individuals with a secure attachment style maintain a positive view of themselves and others, show commitment in relationships, and feel more comfortable in relational settings. These individuals strive to build intimate relationships and do not feel anxious about others' responses to their needs {Mikulincer, 2007 #174529}. Additionally, individuals with secure attachment styles maintain a positive self-image {Morley, 2011 #174537}.

Among the factors significantly influencing students' success and advancement—especially female students—is the family. Internal working models are formed in childhood and utilized throughout social interactions and relationships. Furthermore, the role of the family and its internal communication style significantly affect happiness and interpersonal relationships. If individuals adopt healthy communication patterns, the impact will be clearly reflected in their personal and social lives. Therefore, when the home and family environment is healthy, comforting, and constructive, and interpersonal interactions are warm and affectionate, it fosters the growth and development of family members. Thus, this study aims to answer the question: Can parental attachment styles predict the sense of happiness and hope for the future in female university students?

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study employs an analytical-descriptive and correlational research method and is predictive in nature. In this study, the two variables of happiness and hope for the future are considered as criterion variables, while parental attachment style is considered the predictor variable. The statistical population of the study consisted of all female students enrolled at the Islamic Azad University, Garmsar Branch, during the academic year 2022–2023. The Morgan Table was used to determine the sample size. Based on the available data, the total number of students in the statistical population was 3,200, including 124 doctoral students, 1,026 master's students, and 2,050 undergraduate students. Participants were selected using stratified sampling.

A total of 274 individuals were selected from fields including humanities, engineering and technology, medical sciences, paramedical sciences, and other disciplines. The sampling was purposive and based on clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. After obtaining informed consent, participants were provided with the questionnaires. Inclusion criteria included being a student, no diagnosis of psychiatric disorders (based on self-report), not taking psychiatric medications, no substance or alcohol addiction, and being within the age range of 18 to 35 years. Exclusion criteria included unwillingness to participate, failure to comply with study rules, and not completing the questionnaires.

In this study, the literature review and theoretical background were first compiled through library research. Subsequently, field research was conducted using questionnaires. Finally, the data obtained were analyzed using statistical methods and discussed in comparison with previous research.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Happiness

The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire consists of 29 items and measures individual happiness. It was developed by Michael Argyle in 1989 based on the Beck Depression Inventory. Twenty-one items were adapted and reversed from the Beck Inventory, and eleven new questions were added to cover other aspects of mental health. The questionnaire consists of 29 items, each scored from 0 to 3. The total score ranges from 0 to 87, with higher scores indicating greater levels of happiness. Najafi et al. (2013) reported the reliability of the questionnaire as satisfactory

using methods such as factor analysis, test-retest reliability, internal consistency, and split-half reliability {Momeni, 2022 #174543}.

2.2.2. Hope

The Hope Scale was developed by Snyder in 1991. It consists of 12 items and includes two subscales: agency thinking and pathways thinking. This questionnaire is scored on an 8-point Likert scale and is applicable for individuals aged 15 and above. The score range is between 1 and 64. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was reported as 0.71 in the a study, indicating good reliability {Valikhani, 2016 #174535}.

2.2.3. Attachment Style

This self-report questionnaire was developed by Hazan and Shaver based on Ainsworth's tripartite attachment styles (secure, avoidant, and ambivalent). It includes descriptions of how individuals perceive their relationships with significant others in their current life. The questionnaire has 15 items, with five items corresponding to secure attachment style, five to insecure/avoidant attachment style, and five to insecure/ambivalent attachment style, measured on a 5-point scale. The item with the highest rating indicates the individual's dominant attachment style. Zolfaghari Motlagh et al. (2008) reported internal consistency coefficients for attachment styles ranging from 0.55 to 0.74, and reliability coefficients of 0.84 for secure attachment and 0.78 for insecure-ambivalent attachment {Bayrami, 2012 #174525}.

2.3. Data Analysis

To analyze the collected data and answer the research questions, the study first employed descriptive statistics and demographic charts to report variables such as age and field of study. Inferential statistical methods were subsequently used. For data analysis, Pearson correlation, multiple regression analysis, and path analysis were conducted using AMOS and SPSS software. The significance level was set at 0.05.

3. Findings and Results

The demographic characteristics of the sample included a total of 274 female students from the Islamic Azad University, Garmsar Branch. Of these, 163 students (59.49%) were enrolled in undergraduate programs, 84 students (30.65%) were studying at the master's level, and 27 students (9.85%) were pursuing doctoral degrees. In terms of academic disciplines, 108 students (39.41%) were from humanities, 67 students (24.45%) from engineering and technical fields, 51 students (18.61%) from medical and paramedical sciences, and 48 students (17.52%) were enrolled in other academic programs. The age range of participants was between 18 and 35 years, with a mean age of 22.73 years (SD = 3.91).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Happiness	63.41	9.27
Hope for the Future	51.38	8.54
Secure Attachment Style	21.67	3.42
Avoidant Attachment Style	17.84	3.87
Ambivalent Attachment Style	18.59	4.11

The descriptive statistics show that the mean score for happiness was 63.41 with a standard deviation of 9.27, indicating a relatively high level of happiness among the participants. The mean score for hope for the future was 51.38 with a standard deviation of 8.54. Among the attachment styles, the secure style had the highest mean score (M = 21.67, SD = 3.42), followed by ambivalent (M = 18.59, SD = 4.11) and avoidant (M = 17.84, SD = 3.87) (Table 1).

Prior to conducting regression analyses, the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, homoscedasticity, and independence of errors were examined and confirmed. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated that all primary variables were normally distributed (p > .05 for all), and visual inspections of Q-Q plots supported this finding. Linearity was assessed through scatterplots, which revealed linear relationships between predictor and criterion variables. Multicollinearity was not a concern, as all Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were below 2.13 and

tolerance levels were above 0.47. The assumption of homoscedasticity was confirmed through analysis of residual scatterplots, which showed a consistent spread across the predicted values. Finally, the Durbin-Watson statistic was 1.86 for the happiness model and 2.03 for the hope model, indicating no significant autocorrelation in the residuals.

Table 2

Pearson Correlation Coefficients Between Parental Attachment Styles and Happiness

Attachment Style	r	p
Secure Attachment Style	.44	< .01
Avoidant Attachment Style	−.35	< .01
Ambivalent Attachment Style	−.21	< .01

The correlation analysis shows a significant positive correlation between secure attachment style and happiness ($r = .44$, $p < .01$), suggesting that higher levels of secure attachment are associated with greater happiness. Avoidant attachment style was negatively correlated with happiness ($r = −.35$, $p < .01$), as was ambivalent attachment style ($r = −.21$, $p < .01$), indicating that insecure attachment styles are associated with lower levels of happiness (Table 2).

Table 3

Pearson Correlation Coefficients Between Parental Attachment Styles and Hope for the Future

Attachment Style	r	p
Secure Attachment Style	.50	< .01
Avoidant Attachment Style	−.17	< .01
Ambivalent Attachment Style	−.36	< .01

The correlation between secure attachment style and hope for the future was positive and statistically significant ($r = .50$, $p < .01$), suggesting that students with secure attachment report greater hope. Conversely, avoidant ($r = −.17$, $p < .01$) and ambivalent ($r = −.36$, $p < .01$) attachment styles were negatively associated with hope for the future (Table 3).

Table 4

Summary of Regression Results for Happiness

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	R	R²	Adjusted R²	F	p
Regression	1498.74	3	499.58	.49	.24	.23	17.26	< .01
Residual	4739.82	270	17.55					
Total	6238.56	273						

The multiple regression analysis for happiness indicated that the model was statistically significant, $F(3, 270) = 17.26$, $p < .01$, with an R^2 of .24, meaning that 24% of the variance in happiness can be explained by the attachment styles. The adjusted R^2 value of .23 indicates a good fit of the model to the data.

Table 5

Summary of Regression Results for Hope for the Future

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	R	R²	Adjusted R²	F	p
Regression	2176.91	3	725.64	.56	.31	.30	21.08	< .01
Residual	9288.31	270	34.40					
Total	11465.22	273						

The regression results for hope for the future revealed a statistically significant model, $F(3, 270) = 21.08$, $p < .01$,

with an R² of .31. This indicates that attachment styles explain 31% of the variance in hope for the future. The adjusted R² of .30 supports the model's predictive validity.

Table 6

Multivariate Regression Coefficients Predicting Happiness

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	46.82	2.11	—	22.18	< .01
Secure Attachment Style	0.78	0.14	.38	5.57	< .01
Avoidant Attachment Style	−0.54	0.13	−.29	−4.15	< .01
Ambivalent Attachment Style	−0.31	0.12	−.17	−2.58	< .01

Regression coefficients indicate that secure attachment positively predicts happiness ($\beta = .38$, $t = 5.57$, $p < .01$), while avoidant ($\beta = -.29$, $t = -4.15$, $p < .01$) and ambivalent ($\beta = -.17$, $t = -2.58$, $p < .01$) attachment styles significantly and negatively predict happiness.

Table 7

Multivariate Regression Coefficients Predicting Hope for the Future

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	35.29	2.87	—	12.30	< .01
Secure Attachment Style	1.12	0.17	.44	6.58	< .01
Avoidant Attachment Style	−0.28	0.16	−.11	−1.75	< .01
Ambivalent Attachment Style	−0.69	0.15	−.30	−4.52	< .01

The regression model predicting hope for the future shows that secure attachment style significantly and positively predicts hope ($\beta = .44$, $t = 6.58$, $p < .01$). Avoidant ($\beta = -.11$, $t = -1.75$, $p < .01$) and ambivalent ($\beta = -.30$, $t = -4.52$, $p < .01$) attachment styles are significant negative predictors of hope.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, among the parental attachment styles, two—secure and avoidant attachment—were significantly related to the sense of happiness among female students at the Islamic Azad University, Garmsar Branch. The secure attachment style was able to positively and directly predict 19.3% of the variance in happiness. This finding is consistent with the prior results {Bayrami, 2012 #174525;Dinç, 2022 #174552;Moghadam, 2016 #174549;Momeni, 2008 #174530;Momeni, 2022 #174543}. According to these studies, individuals with a secure attachment style experienced fewer interpersonal problems and higher levels of happiness compared to those with avoidant or ambivalent attachment styles.

This finding can be explained by the idea that the exploratory system in individuals with secure attachment allows them to explore their environment and perceive themselves as capable of controlling situations. Secure attachment gradually fosters a sense of mastery and the ability to cope with disappointment. Ultimately, within the framework of a secure attachment relationship, individuals are able to reflect positive feelings and beliefs about personal values and effectiveness {Kidd, 2011 #174538}. Positive perfectionism, self-esteem, personal control, greater happiness in relationships, better emotional regulation, lower stress, and higher job satisfaction are among the characteristics associated with secure attachment {Yang, 2020 #174547}. Individuals with secure attachment styles tend to form successful relationships and maintain a positive view of themselves and others, which in turn contributes to greater happiness. Moreover, securely attached individuals are less affected by emotional and psychological challenges and, due to reduced feelings of helplessness, experience higher levels of happiness {Moghadam, 2016 #174549}. Additionally, secure individuals, due to their greater capacity to integrate cognition and emotion, are less likely to engage in maladaptive strategies such as daydreaming or clinging to past memories to escape current negative emotions. Instead, they actively seek happiness in the present moment {Momeni, 2022 #174543}.

Secure attachment, through the mediating role of emotion, emotion regulation, and psychological flexibility, is linked to increased happiness, while insecure attachment is related to fear, helplessness, and poor adaptation to situations, leading to negative outcomes. Insecure attachment is negatively and significantly related to happiness through mechanisms such as suppressing failures and misinterpreting situations {Noei Iran, 2016 #174531}. Overall, attachment style influences the cognitive-emotional processes involved in responding to stress and adversity. Secure attachment enhances happiness due to positive cognitive-emotional processes, whereas insecure attachment reduces happiness through negative ones {Dinç, 2022 #174552}.

Regarding secure parental attachment style, it can be stated that parents play the first and most important role in shaping their children's attachment, which forms a vital part of their personality and influences future interpersonal interactions. Parenting styles result in very different outcomes for children's attachment {Zeinali, 2019 #174536}. Attachment styles can be understood as fundamental pathways through which individuals relate to the world. In Argyle's (2013) study on individuals with depression, it was shown that they tended to be isolated, withdrawn, and generally lacked social skills. Argyle then demonstrated that a portion of people's happiness could be explained by their better social skills, particularly assertiveness and cooperation {Argyle, 2013 #174550}. It is evident that the characteristics of happy individuals align with those of securely attached individuals. Securely attached individuals are comfortable forming close and friendly relationships.

Moreover, the avoidant attachment style negatively and inversely predicted 11.9% of the variance in happiness among the female students of the Islamic Azad University, Garmsar Branch. This part of the findings aligns with the prior results {Bayat, 2017 #174524;Jazayeri, 2018 #174527;Moghadam, 2016 #174549;Noei Iran, 2016 #174531}.

This finding can be explained by noting that for individuals with avoidant attachment, self-reliance is of paramount importance. When there is a possibility of rejection by others, they tend to deny their need for attachment in order to preserve a positive self-image, even while they struggle with emotional and psychological issues. However, this greatly diminishes their happiness {Bayat, 2017 #174524}. Attachment style is, in fact, a significant factor in child development and their future quality of life.

Internal working models formed in childhood influence individual behavior and emotional functioning and are closely linked to life quality indicators such as happiness, sense of security, and the absence of conflict in avoidant attachment. Generally, the nature and quality of the parent-child relationship in childhood significantly influence the capacity to form intimate and positive relationships later in life {Kamari, 2015 #174528}.

Given that individuals with insecure attachment styles (avoidant and ambivalent) tend to attribute positive life events to external and unstable causes, they perceive such events as being outside their control or comprehension. This leads to a cycle of chronic hopelessness and pessimism. In contrast, securely attached individuals tend to attribute positive life events to internal and stable causes and negative life events to external and unstable factors. Believing that events are within their control, they are consistently more hopeful and optimistic about the future. Furthermore, individuals with secure attachment better understand themselves and others, maintain more positive evaluations, and as a result, experience greater happiness.

Based on the research findings, two parental attachment styles—secure and ambivalent—were significantly associated with hope for the future among female students of the Islamic Azad University, Garmsar Branch. Secure attachment style was able to positively and directly predict 25.4% of the variance in hope for the future. This portion of the findings aligns with the prior results {Kamari, 2015 #174528;Valikhani, 2016 #174535}.

This finding can be interpreted as evidence that secure attachment style positively affects various psychological and human dimensions of life. Hence, it is unsurprising that secure attachment enhances hope for the future. This result also supports theoretical propositions suggesting that secure attachment to a responsive and supportive figure facilitates the development of goal-oriented hopeful thinking, which in turn contributes to psychological well-being {Shorey, 2003 #174546}. Consequently, it can be concluded that securely attached individuals who internalized positive representations of their caregivers in childhood tend to view themselves as valuable in adulthood and remain hopeful in various areas of life.

Additionally, the ambivalent attachment style negatively and inversely predicted 13.2% of the variance in hope for the future. This finding is consistent with the prior results {Kamari, 2015 #174528;Valikhani, 2016 #174535}. This suggests that as ambivalent attachment increases, individuals' hope for the future tends to turn into

hopelessness. Given the contradictory nature of ambivalent attachment, this is not surprising, as increased anxiety and ambivalence lead individuals to lose even their minimal hope in forming meaningful relationships. Their failure to establish a secure bond with a caregiver or romantic partner leads to despair. However, by fostering hope in ambivalent individuals, it may be possible to help them overcome intrapsychic conflict and develop healthier relationships with significant others.

5. Suggestions and Limitations

One limitation of the study is that the nature of the observed relationships is correlational and not causal. Given the statistical method used and the cross-sectional design of this research, causal interpretations are not appropriate. Furthermore, the sample consisted solely of Iranian participants. Due to the profound cultural differences between Eastern and Western societies, caution must be exercised in generalizing these findings to other populations. Future research is advised to include control variables such as gender, age, educational level, and other demographic factors.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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