




# Modeling Psychological Well-Being Based on Attachment Styles, Personality Traits, and Defense Mechanisms with the Mediation of Coping Strategies in Emergency Medical Service Personnel

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The objective of this study was to model psychological well-being based on attachment styles, personality traits, and defense mechanisms, with the mediating role of coping strategies among emergency medical service personnel.

**Methods and Materials:** The research sample consisted of 210 emergency medical service personnel from the southwest region of Tehran province, selected using purposive sampling. The study utilized a correlational design, and data were collected using standardized questionnaires, including the Ryff Psychological Well-being Scale, the Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS), the Big Five Personality Traits Questionnaire, the Defense Style Questionnaire (DSQ-40), and the Lazarus and Folkman Coping Strategies Questionnaire. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26 and AMOS version 24 for structural equation modeling (SEM), and bootstrapping was employed to test the mediating effects of coping strategies.

**Findings:** The results showed that attachment styles significantly predict psychological well-being with the mediation of coping strategies. A negative relationship was found between anxious and avoidant attachment styles and psychological well-being, while a positive relationship existed between secure attachment and psychological well-being. Personality traits also significantly predicted psychological well-being, with neuroticism negatively impacting it and traits such as openness, agreeableness, extraversion, and conscientiousness enhancing it. Additionally, defense mechanisms had a significant relationship with psychological well-being through coping strategies, with emotion-focused coping strategies negatively affecting well-being.

**Conclusion:** The findings highlight the significant role of attachment styles, personality traits, and defense mechanisms in predicting psychological well-being through coping strategies among emergency medical service personnel. Training

programs that focus on enhancing effective coping strategies and resilience could improve their psychological well-being and overall life satisfaction. These results suggest that psychological interventions should consider individual differences in attachment styles and personality traits to promote better mental health outcomes.

**Keywords:** *Psychological well-being, attachment styles, defense mechanisms, coping strategies.*

## 1. Introduction

One of the most significant sources of psychological stress is an individual's occupation, as it is a major factor that can induce psychological pressures, especially in high-stress jobs (Masa'Deh et al., 2017). An individual's job can play a role in their psychological problems (Awosika & Adeniyi, 2023). Individuals who are satisfied with their job, or those who are less satisfied due to job difficulties, tend to exhibit different emotional or behavioral reactions. Individuals who lack job satisfaction are more likely to experience fatigue and burnout. Consequently, it can be expected that psychological characteristics are related to individuals' mental health in connection with their occupational conditions. Nurses and healthcare staff, in addition to bearing psychological and physical pressures, also face unique stressors, such as time urgency and dealing with critical patient situations, which in turn lead to the development of negative emotions (Ren et al., 2021).

Healthcare staff, due to the need for high skills, focus, strong teamwork, and precise care, face high job stress (Shahrokhi et al., 2018), and these factors can significantly impact their psychological well-being, presenting them with serious challenges (Shen et al., 2021). Additionally, given the importance of healthcare workers' mental health in advancing organizational goals and improving the quality of healthcare services, paying attention to psychological well-being is critical. This is because psychological well-being influences other psychological factors, individuals, and their performance (Luo & Hancock, 2020). The effectiveness of this psychological variable can be explained by its association with increased happiness, pleasure, and the avoidance of pain. In psychological well-being, individuals actualize their capabilities, which correlates with personal understanding (Rahgoi, 2024; Zhang, 2024).

Given the aforementioned points, it can be expected that by increasing psychological well-being, psychological problems and vulnerabilities will decrease in the future (Sagone et al., 2023; Shahla et al., 2022; Trudel-Fitzgerald et al., 2019). Therefore, attention to important individual psychological variables in explaining psychological well-being is essential. In this study, examining attachment styles,

personality traits, and defense mechanisms in relation to psychological well-being is of particular importance. Furthermore, according to Bowlby's (1973) perspective, attachment relationships remain active throughout an individual's life cycle. This means that a child's emotional relationship with their caregiver can result in long-term consequences that persist into adulthood (Annalakshmi, 2019; Demircioğlu & Göncü Köse, 2021). Additionally, the development of drives and the fulfillment of other childhood needs, which are achieved by the family, are shaped by attachment styles. Research also shows that low attachment to parents can lead to behavioral problems (Karantzas et al., 2023; Myrick et al., 2014; Sagone et al., 2023).

Regarding the importance of attachment styles, it can be stated that anxious and avoidant/ambivalent attachment styles are positively associated with psychological problems. Furthermore, individuals with anxious and avoidant/ambivalent attachment styles are less likely to solve their problems and tend to avoid issues. The anxious/avoidant attachment style is also linked to avoiding and neglecting stress, using medication, distraction, and engaging in harmful behaviors when faced with problems. Overall, attachment styles play a significant role in psychological issues and explain psychological characteristics (Karantzas et al., 2023; Kaur, 2024; Khorrani Nobandi & Yaghoubi Pour, 2024). In addition to attachment styles, personality traits also play a role as individual and contextual factors in relation to psychological well-being. It is also expected that examining personality traits can provide significant insights into understanding work-related problems. Furthermore, a lack of suitable psychological well-being may be one of the key factors contributing to destructive job behaviors and is related to individual abnormalities (Abedi et al., 2024; Alnuaimi et al., 2024; Eichenberg, 2024; Haji Adineh et al., 2024; Tang, 2024).

In psychoanalytic theory, defense mechanisms are considered part of a normal cognitive development and relational pattern that are associated with self-esteem and individual adaptation. Therefore, understanding and accessing defense mechanisms as one of the fundamental constructs of personality that influence thought and behavior is crucial (Shahla et al., 2022). All individuals use defense

mechanisms in their daily lives. When these mechanisms are used adaptively and in balance, they facilitate life, but excessive use of defense mechanisms can lead to disruptions in life, executive functioning, and personality (Parchment, 2023; Porcerelli et al., 2016).

Moreover, coping strategies can serve as important variables in the relationship between attachment styles, personality traits, and defense mechanisms, influencing the nature of the relationship. Coping strategies encompass all the responses individuals use from their behavioral repertoire when faced with dangers. In other words, these reactions include all specific methods, such as overcompensation, surrender, and avoidance (Karbasi et al., 2024; Parchment, 2023). When an individual adopts a particular habitual response and displays a specific adaptive behavior, the adaptive response is related to coping strategies. Thus, coping strategies are a trait, while adaptive reactions are situational, and they can play a role in individuals' psychological characteristics (Miri & Zahiri, 2024; Morento, 2024). Coping strategies are common responses individuals use when facing stressful situations, which can be categorized into task-focused, avoidance-focused, and emotion-focused types (Alborzi & Khosh Lahjeh Sedgh, 2023). Folkman and Lazarus (1988) defined coping strategies as cognitive and behavioral efforts aimed at overcoming or reducing stress. Coping strategies also lead to the interpretation, modification, and alleviation of a stressful situation and reduce the resulting distress (Jodaki et al., 2023).

Therefore, the findings of various studies suggest a relationship between coping strategies and psychological problems as well as behavioral issues. Considering the factors influencing psychological well-being and based on the research background, this study seeks to address the question of whether coping strategies can act as a mediating factor in the relationship between psychological well-being and attachment styles, personality traits, and defense mechanisms through the development of a conceptual model.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

The statistical population of this study included emergency medical technicians (paramedics) from the southwest region of Tehran province (Islamshahr, Shahriar, Malard, Parand, and Robat Karim) in 2023, with an approximate number of 450 individuals. To select the

research sample, purposive sampling was used, and 210 emergency technicians from the southwest region of Tehran province in 2023 were chosen, based on the Krejcie and Morgan table and the size of the target population.

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Psychological Well-being

This questionnaire, developed by Ryff et al. (1989), consists of 18 items. Scoring for Ryff's Psychological Well-being Questionnaire is based on a six-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The questionnaire includes six components (self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth), with three items for each component, resulting in a total score. Ryff (1989) reported the reliability of the test using Cronbach's alpha, with coefficients ranging from 0.72 to 0.89 (Zargar Kharazi Esfahani et al., 2023).

#### 2.2.2. Attachment Style

This scale was designed by Collins and Read (1990) and consists of 21 items. Currently, the scale includes 18 items and has three subscales: secure attachment (items 1, 6, 8, 12, 13, 17), avoidant attachment (items 2, 5, 14, 16, 7, 18), and ambivalent/anxious attachment (items 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 15). Items 6, 8, 17, 5, 16, and 18 are reverse-scored. According to the questionnaire manual, six items correspond to each subscale. The scoring is done on a five-point Likert scale (1 = not at all characteristic of me, 5 = very characteristic of me). In Collins and Read's (1990) study, the reliability of the questionnaire was estimated with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.80. For the secure subscale, Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.80 to 0.82, avoidant from 0.78 to 0.80, and anxious from 0.83 to 0.85. In Pakdaman's (2001) research, the test's validity was confirmed through test-retest reliability, with a significant correlation between two administrations of the questionnaire over one month, at the 95% confidence level (Akbari et al., 2018).

#### 2.2.3. Personality Traits

This instrument, developed by Goldberg (1999), contains 50 items. The questionnaire assesses five major personality factors, each with 10 items. These five factors are commonly referred to as neuroticism (items 24, 4, 44, 49, 29, 19, 14, 9, 34, 39), extraversion (items 31, 21, 46, 11, 1, 26, 16), openness to experience (items 25, 15, 50, 20, 10, 30, 35, 5,

40, 45), agreeableness (items 32, 7, 2, 22, 17, 12, 37, 27, 42), and conscientiousness (items 38, 28, 43, 18, 8, 48, 33, 13, 3). Scoring is based on a five-point Likert scale, with 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. Items 2, 6, 8, 9, 12, 16, 18, 19, 22, 26, 28, 32, 38, 41, and 46 are reverse-scored. Khormaei (2006) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.75 for the overall scale. The reliability coefficients for neuroticism, openness to experience, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and extraversion were 0.88, 0.78, 0.80, 0.80, and 0.78, respectively, indicating the tool's good reliability (Dehghani et al., 2017; Sepehvand et al., 2020; Zargar Kharazi Esfahani et al., 2023).

#### 2.2.4. Defense Style

Developed by Andrews et al. (1993), this questionnaire consists of 40 items. It is an evolution of the original questionnaire by Bond et al. (1983) and distinguishes and differentiates 20 defense mechanisms across three factors: mature, immature, and neurotic defenses. Immature defense mechanisms include rationalization (items 4 to 16), projection (items 6 to 29), denial (items 8 to 18), omnipotence (items 9 to 15), devaluation (items 10 to 13), acting out (items 11 to 20), somatization (items 12 to 27), autistic fantasy (items 14 to 17), splitting (items 19 to 22), passive aggression (items 23 to 36), displacement (items 31 to 33), and isolation (items 34 to 37). Mature defense mechanisms include sublimation (items 3 to 38), suppression (items 2 to 25), humor (items 5 to 26), and anticipation (items 30 to 35). Neurotic defense mechanisms include pseudo-altruism (items 1 to 39), reaction formation (items 7 to 28), intellectualization (items 21 to 24), and undoing (items 32 to 40). Scoring is done on a nine-point Likert scale. The individual receives a score between 2 and 18 for each defense mechanism. A score above 10 in any defense mechanism indicates the individual's use of that defense mechanism. The individual's mean score across all styles is then compared to other styles, and the highest mean indicates the dominant defense style. In Andrews et al.'s (1993) research, the reliability for the overall questionnaire and its dimensions was reported to be above 0.70 (Monajem et al., 2018).

#### 2.2.5. Coping Strategies

Developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1988), this questionnaire contains 66 items. It measures eight coping strategies: confrontation (items 6, 7, 17, 28, 34, 46), distancing (items 12, 13, 15, 21, 41, 44), self-controlling (items 10, 14, 35, 43, 54, 62, 63), seeking social support (items 8, 18, 22, 31, 42, 45), accepting responsibility (items 9, 25, 29, 51), escape-avoidance (items 11, 16, 33, 40, 47, 50, 58, 59), planful problem-solving (items 1, 26, 39, 48, 49, 52), and positive reappraisal (items 20, 23, 30, 36, 38, 56, 60). The individual's score for each scale is obtained by summing their responses to the corresponding items. Problem-focused coping includes seeking social support, accepting responsibility, planful problem-solving, and positive reappraisal. Emotion-focused coping includes confrontation, distancing, self-controlling, and escape-avoidance. Scoring is done on a four-point Likert scale (0 = not used, 4 = used most of the time). Lazarus reported internal consistency values ranging from 0.66 to 0.79 for each coping style. In Rostami's (2012) study, the Cronbach's alpha for the overall test was 0.87 (Alborzi & Khosh Lahjeh Sedgh, 2023; Jodaki et al., 2023).

#### 2.3. Data analysis

For data analysis, the collected data were processed using SPSS version 26 and AMOS version 24 software. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and ranges, were calculated to summarize the data. Pearson correlation was used to examine the relationships between the variables, and path analysis was conducted to assess the direct and indirect effects of attachment styles, personality traits, and defense mechanisms on psychological well-being, with coping strategies as the mediating variable. Multivariate outliers were detected and removed using Mahalanobis distance. Additionally, the bootstrapping method was applied to test the significance of the mediating relationships. Model fit was evaluated using indices such as GFI, AGFI, CFI, TLI, and RMSEA.

### 3. Findings and Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive findings related to the variables of the present study for the research sample:

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables*

Research Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Psychological Well-being	102.32	3.45	41	171
Attachment Styles	37.19	0.712	11	48
Personality Traits	135.62	5.901	34	182
Defense Mechanisms	87.91	6.129	38	103
Coping Strategies	81.15	4.278	28	99

As seen in Table 1, the mean and standard deviation for psychological well-being are 102.32 and 3.45, respectively; the mean and standard deviation for attachment styles are

37.19 and 0.712; for personality traits, they are 135.62 and 5.901; and for defense mechanisms, they are 87.91 and 6.129.

**Table 2**

*Correlation Matrix of Research Variables in the Sample*

Row	Research Variables	Psychological Well-being	Attachment Styles	Personality Traits	Defense Mechanisms	Coping Strategies
1	Psychological Well-being	1				
2	Attachment Styles	0.665	1			
3	Personality Traits	0.552	0.737	1		
4	Defense Mechanisms	0.758	0.744	0.299	1	
5	Coping Strategies	0.845	0.589	0.644	0.344	1

As shown in Table 2, all the correlation coefficients between the research variables are statistically significant at the level of  $p < 0.05$ .

In this study, to examine univariate outliers, the  $z$  score for each individual in each variable was calculated using SPSS. The results indicated that none of the participants were considered univariate outliers. Additionally, to identify multivariate outliers, the Mahalanobis distance for the exogenous variables in the model was calculated. The Mahalanobis distance refers to the distance between an individual's composite score and the group's composite mean score across all variables (Giles, 2002). If the largest Mahalanobis distance exceeds the critical chi-square value for a given number of predictor variables at  $p = 0.05$ , the presence of multivariate outliers is indicated. The minimum and maximum Mahalanobis distances in the present study were found to be 0.312 and 48.77, respectively. Given that

the critical chi-square value at  $p = 0.01$  is 15.83, and the largest Mahalanobis distance is 48.77, five participants with Mahalanobis distances greater than the chi-square value were considered multivariate outliers and were removed from the dataset.

To test the proposed model, structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted using AMOS version 24. The mediating relationships in the final model were also tested using bootstrapping in AMOS version 18.

The fit indices of the proposed model, including the goodness-of-fit index (GFI = 0.540), adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI = 0.669), comparative fit index (CFI = 0.606), incremental fit index (IFI = 0.608), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI = 0.565), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA = 0.177), suggest a good model fit.

Table 3 shows the paths and their standardized coefficients in the proposed structural model:

**Table 3**

*Structural Model – Paths and Standardized Coefficients for Direct Effects in the Proposed Model*

Path	Standardized $\beta$	Significance Level (p)
Avoidant Attachment → Psychological Well-being	-0.512	0.000
Anxious Attachment → Psychological Well-being	-0.083	0.002
Secure Attachment → Psychological Well-being	0.144	0.000
Personality Traits → Psychological Well-being	0.099	0.000
Defense Mechanisms → Psychological Well-being	-0.127	0.001
Coping Strategies → Psychological Well-being	0.152	0.002

Based on the results presented in Table 3, all path coefficients in the final model are statistically significant. To examine the mediating relationships between the research

variables, bootstrapping was used. The results for hypotheses 1 through 3 are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Bootstrapping Results for the Relationship Between Independent, Dependent, and Mediating Variables*

Path	Data	Bootstrap Value	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Standard Error	Bias
Attachment Styles in Predicting Psychological Well-being with the Mediation of Coping Strategies	-0.111	-0.114	-0.208	-0.119	0.026	0.015
Personality Traits in Predicting Psychological Well-being with the Mediation of Coping Strategies	0.018	0.162	0.042	0.008	0.010	0.015
Defense Mechanisms in Predicting Psychological Well-being with the Mediation of Coping Strategies	0.039	0.178	0.062	0.014	0.014	0.008

The path coefficient between attachment styles and psychological well-being with the mediation of coping strategies is  $\beta = -0.114$ , which is statistically significant at the level of  $p < 0.05$  (the lower and upper bounds do not include zero). The path coefficient between personality traits and psychological well-being with the mediation of coping strategies is  $\beta = 0.162$ , which is statistically significant at the level of  $p < 0.05$  (the lower and upper bounds do not include zero). The path coefficient between defense mechanisms and psychological well-being with the mediation of coping strategies is  $\beta = 0.178$ , which is statistically significant at the level of  $p < 0.05$  (the lower and upper bounds do not include zero).

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results indicated that attachment styles play a role in predicting psychological well-being with the mediation of coping strategies among emergency medical service personnel.

The findings of this study showed a significant negative relationship between anxious attachment style and psychological well-being. These results align with the findings of prior studies (Akbari et al., 2018; Andrews & Hicks, 2017; Bigdeli et al., 2013; Davis et al., 2016; Young et al., 2020).

In explaining these findings, it can be said that anxious attachment is associated with feelings of fear and an inability to adapt to situations, leading to a significant decrease in psychological well-being. The suppression of failures and incorrect assessments of situations results in a negative and significant relationship with well-being. Adults with secure attachment are more effective in establishing favorable interpersonal relationships. The trust formed in the process of proper attachment development between a child and their

primary caregiver helps the individual accept their strengths and weaknesses, become aware of different aspects of their personality, and define and pursue their life goals (Akbari et al., 2018). The acquisition and growth of these traits enhance the quality of psychological well-being, as conceptualized by Ryff, including indices such as purpose in life, self-acceptance, and positive relationships with others.

One of the most important assumptions of attachment theory is that secure individuals' working models guide them toward better adaptation to adverse events compared to insecure individuals.

Other results of this study demonstrated a significant negative relationship between avoidant attachment style and psychological well-being. Additionally, a significant positive relationship was found between secure attachment style and psychological well-being, consistent with the prior findings (Akbari et al., 2018; Demircioğlu & Göncü Köse, 2021; Karantzas et al., 2023; Myrick et al., 2014; Nourialegha et al., 2020; Sagone et al., 2023). These findings can be explained by the fact that individuals with secure attachment use adaptive strategies to cope with various life situations and events. They possess high emotional maturity and flexibility, engage in meaningful social interactions, and focus on setting and pursuing long-term goals, relying on personal and social values. Consequently, they experience higher psychological well-being. Conversely, individuals with insecure attachment struggle to regulate their emotions, cope with stress passively, avoid social interactions, refuse to take responsibility, and deprive themselves of meaning and purpose in life, leading to lower psychological well-being.

The results also revealed a significant relationship between personality traits and psychological well-being, mediated by coping strategies, consistent with the prior

findings (Dehghani et al., 2017; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Khalatbari et al., 2019; Randall et al., 2017; Rothe, 2017; Sepehvand et al., 2020; Zargar Kharazi Esfahani et al., 2023).

In explaining these findings, it can be said that neuroticism increases an individual's susceptibility to stressful events, which can harm their interpersonal and social relationships as well as their psychological well-being. Conversely, personality traits such as openness, agreeableness, extraversion, and conscientiousness increase an individual's readiness for enjoyable experiences, which strengthens personal and social relationships and enhances psychological well-being. These personality dimensions lead to positive outcomes for the individual, increasing positive emotions and ultimately improving psychological well-being. In contrast, neuroticism, associated with anxiety, stress, depression, and other symptoms that decrease mental health, leads to negative emotions and subsequently reduces psychological well-being.

The findings also indicated a significant relationship between defense mechanisms and psychological well-being, mediated by coping strategies, which is consistent with the previous studies (Parchment, 2023; Porcerelli et al., 2016; Shahla et al., 2022).

In explaining these results, it can be said that emotion-focused coping strategies lead individuals to rely on other means, such as anger or crying, instead of confronting problems. As a result, they learn to solve problems through these means rather than effectively addressing the issue itself. Consequently, they are unable to solve their problems efficiently, as they focus on alternative strategies rather than the problem, and blame others, which prevents them from resolving their issues. Therefore, individuals who use these coping strategies experience cognitive and emotional distress, reducing their psychological well-being. It can also be argued that individuals resort to emotion-focused coping strategies when they perceive situations as beyond their skills and abilities. As a result, individuals who experience severe or uncontrollable stressful events are more likely to use this type of coping strategy, which, through repeated exposure to stress and continued use of emotion-focused coping, jeopardizes their psychological well-being.

## 5. Limitations & Suggestions

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are suggested: Given the research findings, it is recommended that relevant authorities conduct workshops

and training sessions to familiarize their employees with effective coping strategies and teach them ways to enhance resilience, thereby increasing life satisfaction and improving their psychological well-being. Additionally, it is recommended to provide training on coping strategies to employees to promote their psychological well-being. Organizations and companies should also hold educational courses on identifying personality traits to help individuals become more familiar with their hidden and overt characteristics, ultimately improving their psychological well-being.

Finally, it should be noted that research is always a purposeful and systematic process, often encountering certain limitations due to available resources and conditions. Attention to these limitations in future studies can help improve the execution of similar research. This study was not without challenges and obstacles, including the following: this research was conducted on emergency medical personnel, so generalizing the results to employees in other cities, provinces, and social groups should be done with caution. The sole data collection method in this study was self-report questionnaires, which are subject to biases in responses. Additionally, there was no opportunity to explore other factors that may affect the modeling of psychological well-being in emergency medical personnel, which might have influenced the results.

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## Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared 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. The respondents provided written statements including ethical consent, and they were assured of the confidentiality of their information.

## Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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## Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed in this article.

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