The Relationship between Early Separation Anxiety, Attachment Styles and Adjustment

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between early separation anxiety, attachment styles and adjustment. The participants of study are 158 female and 105 male university students. Their ages are between 17-19 and age means are 18.66 (Ss:0.51). To collect data personal information form, The Separation Anxiety Symptom Scale (Ceyhan, 2000), Raynolds Adolescent Adjustment Screening Inventory (adapted to Turkish by Meric, 2007) and The Inventory of Experiences on Close Relationships (Sumer, 2006) were used. According to results, there is a significant positive correlation between early separation anxiety and adjustment – high points state general adjustment of people- ($r=.26$, $p<.001$). There is also significant positive correlation between early separation anxiety and avoidance - dimension of attachment styles- ($r=.13$, $p<.05$). Another significant positive correlation between early separation anxiety and anxiety -dimension of attachment styles- ($r=.40$, $p<.001$) was found. These results show that early separation anxiety correlate with adjustment and attachment styles.

Key Words: early separation anxiety, attachment styles, adjustment

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Separation anxiety is the fear of leaving the primary caregiver. This person is generally mother of a child (Rapee, Spence, Cobham & Wignall, 2003). It is the presence of excessive anxiety due to separation from home or attached person (Üre, Arı & Seçer, 2001). Separation anxiety manifests itself as fear of separation, uneasiness, agitation, pettishness and insomnia. It might cause severe social disorders if it is not treated or wrong attitudes are shown.

Children with separation anxiety experience a deep shock when they have to separate from their primary caregiver for any reason. In severe cases, the child can follow the parent from one room to another to remain within his/her eyesight. The child generally avoids going to school, experiences a shock when his/her parents want to take him/her out; refuses staying overnight in a different house and always wants to stay with his/her parents. Some of the children complain from stomach ache or physical ailments when they separate and tantrum can be observed in many other. The reason for these behaviors seem to be the fear of happening something terrible to the parent or to the child and never being able to see each other again when they are separated (Rapee et al., 2003).

Life is the constant effort of a living thing to adjust to its surrounding. Adjustment is a dynamic process and is achieved through the reactions an individual develops to the changes in the surrounding. Adjustment level is determined by two primary factors: personality characteristics of the individual and situation he/she encounters in his/her surrounding. It is rather difficult to evaluate adjustment level of humans, who show significant differences from other living things. Achievement and failure of humans cannot be measured only by the continuance of their biological existence; it is evaluated by their specific place in the world (Geçtan, 2004). Life satisfaction of an individual depends on learning adjustment methods. Maladjustment means both unhappiness for the individual and decreased productivity and waste of labor force resource for the society (Kurç 1990; Cited by; Köksal, 1997). Hamburg and Adams (1967) defined adjustment as 'collection of necessary data and making use of them when challenged'. On the other hand, Heath (1965) defined adjustment as 'organizing behaviors in such a way to preserve the integrity of self-structure in one hand and to cope with environmental conditions on the other hand'(Cited by Geçtan, 2004). An adjusted person manages his/her life and has self-confidence. He/she uses his/her own value judgments, seeks the solution of his/her problems about himself/herself and can make his/her own decisions without expecting other people's decisions (Corey, 1982; Cited by: Alver1998). Maladjustment, on the other hand, means unhappiness for the individuals; decreased productivity and waste of labor force source for the society (Kurç 1990). Negative situations

in childhood period, divorce, physical ailments might cause a normal person to be susceptible to adjustment disorder (Brown and Anderson, 1991; Pollock 1992).

Attachment theory provides important data to understand anxiety through theoretical data and research results. According to Bowlby (1982) the origins of adult anxiety goes back to childhood experiences. Bowlby (1982) defined attachment as, "a strong desire when a person feels in cases of fear, fatigue or illness to build a relationship with a figure or to seek proximity". Studies on attachment styles in adulthood began with Hazan and Shaver in 1980s. Hazan and Shaver (1987), proposed a triarchic model for adult attachment styles including secure, anxious/ambivalent and avoidant attachment styles. In recent years, studies on adult attachment styles mainly employ a quadruple attachment model (Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991; Bartholomew and Shaver, 1998). The model consists of a quadruple attachment structure involving the intersection of positive-negative self and other areas: secure, dismissing, fearful and preoccupied attachment styles. In two-dimensional attachment model, low scores obtained from anxiety dimension point out to positive self model, while high scores point out to negative self model. A positive self model involves the feeling of self-confidence and lovability without a need of external approval, while a negative self model involves the need for other people's approval for a positive self (anxiety). Low scores obtained from avoidance dimension point out to positive other model; while high scores point out to negative others model (Brennan et al., 1998). Positive others model means not feeling hesitant to search support and proximity in close relationships and having negative expectations about others. On the other hand, negative others model means having negative expectations about others (avoidance). Having a positive attitude towards one's self leads to less anxiety. In addition, causing negative emotions such as tension, insecurity, uneasiness and fear, high level of anxiety results in lack of self-confidence and trust to surrounding (Aydın & Dilmaç, 2004; Geçtan, 1981) and expecting to be damaged by other people (Çakmak & Hedevanlı, 2005). These characteristics are similar to the characteristics of the individual in insecure attachment styles (preoccupied and fearful). According to attachment theory, (Bowlby, 1982, 1988; Cassidy et al., 2009), lack of attachment figure in distressing and stressful situations or doubting availability of attachment figure, in other words, lack of secure base, might cause anxiety and thus development of insecure attachment. Positive relationship between negative self and negative others model and trait anxiety in two-dimensional attachment model and the finding obtained from categorical classification are consistent with the findings of previous studies (Bifulco, Moran, Ball, & Bernazzani, 2002; Cassidy, Lichtenstein-Phelps, Sibrava, Thomas, & Borkovec, 2008; Ceyhan, 2006; Hamarta,

2004; Durmuşoğlu, Hamarta, Deniz & Öztürk, 2006; Kobak, Sudler, & Gamble, 1991; Mitchell & Doumas, 2004; Mikulincer & Sheffi, 2000; Muris, Meesters, van Melick, & Zwambag, 2001; Prigerson, Shear, Bierhals, Zonarich, & Reynolds, 1996; Simonelli, Ray & Pincus, 2004; Sümer & Güngör, 1999; Weems, Berman, Silverman, & Rodriguez, 2002).

Development of healthy individuals is closely related with a healthy childhood. In child development, mother-child relationship and the quality of this relationship is of great importance in raising a psychologically and physically healthy individual. In this context, it is believed that separation anxiety experienced before 18 months of age, is related to adjustment and attachment behaviors of the individual. The purpose of this study is to investigate relationship among Early Separation Anxiety, Attachment Styles (Anxiety and Avoidance) and Adjustment in university students.

Method

Participants

This research used survey model. The participants were chosen with random cluster sampling method among undergraduates attending to the above mentioned faculties. The ages of the undergraduates ranged between 17 and 19 years (x= 18.66 ss = .51) of the sample, 158 of them are females and 105 are males.

Intruments

Separation Anxiety Symptom Inventory. Separation Anxiety Symptom Inventory (SASI) was developed by Ceyhan (2000) and measures separation anxiety symptoms of young adults about experiences until the age of eighteen. Three sub-dimensions of SASI are "uneasiness experienced when the child is separated from his/her parents and anxiety of damage to family members", "school phobia", and "anxiety of staying alone". These sub-dimensions can be used to determine total separation anxiety (Ceyhan, 2000). In studies carried out with university students to determine criteria validity of SASI, it was found that correlation between SASI and State Anxiety Scale was .51, correlation between SASI and Trait Anxiety Scale was .67 and correlation between Beck's Anxiety Inventory was .62. Internal consistency coefficients of SASI were found to be .91, .83 and .87 relatively. In addition, mean item total correlation coefficients of the scale was found to be .46. On the other hand, mean item correlation coefficients of three factors were found to be .60, .53 and .61 respectively. Test re-test method showed that SASI had a reliability coefficient of .77 (Ceyhan, 2000). SASI does not aim to diagnose individuals due to their past experiences. It

can be used in various studies to determine first separation anxiety symptom levels of young adults before the age of eighteen (Ceyhan, 2006).

Reynolds Adolescent Adjustment Screening Inventory (RAASI).The inventory was developed by Reynolds (1998) and adapted to Turkish by Meriç, (2007). The inventory aims to measure emotional behavioral adjustment problems of adolescents between the ages of 12-19 in a quick and easy manner. The inventory consists of a total of 32 items in which the individual were asked to assess how they felt in the last 6 months. The answers included three options (Almost Never, Sometimes, and Almost Always). High scores derived from the scale indicate maladjustment. The first two domains about item scope involve communication problems and emotional problems including anxiety and depression. The following domains are anger control problem as a factor of expressing problems; a domain about objection behavior, which causes harsh behaviors and agreement difficulties with friends and adults, which is considered to signal more serious adjustment problems and the domain of self-confidence suppression of the problems focusing on positive social interactions.

Cronbach's alpha correlation coefficients calculated for REUTE (AdjT) and sub-scales are as follows: REUTE (AdjT): .91, Emotional Distress (ED): .88, Anger Control Problem (AC): .83, Anti-Social Behavior (AB): .80 and Positive Self (PS): .73. REUTE Total Adjustment (AdjT) test-re test correlation coefficient was calculated as r= .89. Correlation coefficients based on sub-dimensions were found to be AB: r= .85; AC: r= .83; ED: r= .85; PS: r= .86. It was found that there was a positive significant relationship between separation anxiety experienced in the past and high scores and adjustment expressing general maladjustment of individuals (*r=.26, p<.001*). Findings of the study revealed positive significant relationships between separation anxiety experienced in the past and avoidance (*r=.13, p<.05*) and anxiety (*r=.40, p<.001*).

The Inventory of Experiences on Close Relationships (IECR). The inventory of experiences on close relationships was developed by Brennan, Clark and Shaver (1998). The scale is composed of two dimensions that are characterized as avoidance and anxiety. It is constituted from a total of 36 items of which 18 of it are on avoidance dimension and 18 on anxiety. On the two dimensional attachment model, while the low scores obtained from anxiety and avoidance dimensions beckons positive model of self and positive model of others; the higher scores imply negative self and negative others model (Brennan et al., 1998). As the participants can be evaluated in the basis of this two dimensions, by using the scores they obtain from 2 dimensions, they can also be classified in one of the four categories that are determined via cluster analysis and shows concordance with the quart attachment model

(secure attachment, dismissing attachment, preoccupied attachment and fearful attachment) that Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) suggests. By this way, two types of measurement can be gathered from the scale, as dimensions based on progressive measurement and categorical classification bases. The scale is evaluated by considering each item on a Likert seven point type assessment (1 = I totally do not agree, 7 = I totally agree). The IECR was adapted to Turkish by Sümer & Güngör (1999) in a research with Turkish undergraduate students and the factor structure as a four-category model of attachment was confirmed. On the work that has been carried out by Sümer (2006) that compares the Relations Survey, the Relationship Scales Survey and the Inventory of Experiences on Close Relationships which are used to measure the attachment styles and levels; also the reliability and validity testing of the IECR has been done. In the research it has been found that the scales in a two factor structure (anxiety and avoidance). It has been found that the reliability (internal consistency) coefficients, is .86 for anxiety dimension and .90 for avoidance dimension.

Data Analysis

SPSS 16.0 program was used in order to evaluate the data which were collected from scales employed in the research. The Pearson correlation coefficient technique was used to determine the relationship between Early Separation Anxiety, Attachment Styles (Anxiety and Avoidance) and Adjustment.

Results

Table 1: *The Relation between Early Separation Anxiety, Attachment Styles (Anxiety and Avoidance) and Adjustment*

	Adjustment	*Avoidance*	Anxiety
Early Separation Anxiety	26***	.13*	.40***

*$p < .05$, ***$p < .001$

When table 1 is examined, it is found that there is a positive correlation with the Early Separation Anxiety scores of the undergraduates and attachment avoidance(*r=.13, p<.05*) and anxiety(*r=.40, p<.01*). Also, there is a positive correlation between early separation anxiety and adjustment (*r=.26, p<.001*).

Discussion

In the study it was found that there was a positive relationship between past separation anxiety experience and adjustment level of an individual. Considering that the scores derived

from adjustment score points out to maladjustment, increased separation anxiety scores also increase maladjustment.

There was a positive significant relationship between separation anxiety and anxiety and avoidant dimensions (self model and others model) in attachment. In two-dimensional attachment model, low scores obtained from anxiety dimension indicate positive self model, while high scores indicate negative self model. On the other hand, low scores obtained from avoidance dimension indicate positive others model, while high scores indicate negative others model (Brennan et al., 1998). According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982, 1988; Cassidy et al., 2009) lack of or doubting the availability of attachment figure in distressing and stressful situations, in other words, lack of secure base, might cause anxiety and thus insecure attachment. This finding is consistent with the findings of previous studies (Bifulco et al., 2002; Cassidy et al., 2009; Ceyhan, 2006; Durmuşoğlu et al., Hamarta, 2004; 2006; Kobak et al., 1991; Mitchell & Doumas, 2004; Mikulincer & Sheffi, 2000; Muris et al., 2001; Prigerson et al., 1996; Simonelli et al., 2004; Sümer & Güngör, 1999; Weems et al., 2002).

The significant relationship between separation anxiety and adjustment attachment styles indicate the importance of the attitudes of conscious parents in raising children with self-confidence, who build healthy relationships with their surroundings. Furthermore, longitudinal future studies will further contributes to obtaining more reliable data in this field.

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