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Orginal Article

The Structural Model of Predicting Social Interest based on Attachment Styles with the Mediating Role of Forgiveness in Women

Akram Esfahani*
Hasan Heydari**
Zabih Pirani***
Hosein Davodi****

Abstract

This study was conducted to present a structural model for predicting social interest based on attachment styles, with the mediating role of forgiveness in women. The research was applied for a purpose, quantitative in terms of data, and descriptive–correlational in method. The statistical population consisted of all women attending community centers (Sarāy-e Mahallāt) in Tehran during the years 2020–2021. Using the minimum sample size requirement for structural equation modeling and single-stage cluster random sampling, 305 participants were selected as the sample. Standardized questionnaires—including the Social Interest Questionnaire (Crandall & Reimanis, 1976), the Attachment Styles Questionnaire (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), and the Forgiveness Questionnaire (Rye et al., 2001)—were used for data collection. Content and construct validity were examined, and reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and McDonald's omega, all of which indicated acceptable validity and reliability of the instruments. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics (structural equation modeling) via SPSS-23 and LISREL 8.7. The findings showed that the proposed model had a good fit. Results also indicated that attachment styles have a direct effect on social interest in women. Furthermore, attachment styles influence social interest indirectly through forgiveness. The study revealed that insecure attachment styles—particularly avoidant and ambivalent—reduce social

* Ph.D student, Consulting Department, Arak Branch, Islamic Azad University, Arak, Iran.
** Associate Professor, Counseling Department, Faculty of Humanities, Khomeyn Branch, Islamic Azad University, Khomeyn, Iran. *Corresponding* Author: heidarihassan@yahoo.com
*** Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Humanities, Arak Branch, Islamic Azad University, Arak, Iran.
**** Assistant Professor, Counseling Department, Faculty of Humanities, Khomeyn Branch, Islamic Azad University, Khomeyn, Iran.

interest, whereas secure attachment, through greater trust and better emotional regulation, enhances it. Attachment styles also affect social interest indirectly, as individuals with insecure attachment tend to exhibit lower forgiveness and weaker emotional intimacy due to fear of rejection and mistrust. Forgiveness plays a significant mediating role and reduces the negative effects of insecure attachment. Early family experiences play a crucial role in shaping attachment patterns and the development of social interest. Based on the findings, training programs focusing on social interest and forgiveness, as well as therapeutic approaches such as emotion-focused, behavioral, and narrative therapies, are recommended to improve relationships and reduce marital conflicts.

Keywords: Attachment styles, Forgiveness among women, Social interest

Extended Abstract

Introduction

Human beings are inherently social, and their psychological well-being depends greatly on belongingness and interpersonal cooperation. In Adler's theory, social interest is a fundamental indicator of individual and societal health, and its deficiency leads to maladjustment (Grad & Zeligman, 2017; Dumais et al., 2016). Marital studies also show that social interest significantly predicts relationship quality and satisfaction (Williamson & Lavner, 2020).

Attachment styles, shaped by early caregiving experiences, influence emotional regulation, interpersonal behaviors, and marital satisfaction throughout adulthood (Fraley & Roisman, 2019; Hocking et al., 2016). Secure attachment generally facilitates positive adjustment, whereas insecure styles relate to distress and relational conflict (Tepeli Temiz & Tarı Cömert, 2018; Zandi Goharrizi et al., 2023).

Forgiveness, a key construct in positive psychology, contributes to reduced anger, improved mental health, and restored intimacy (Park et al., 2013; Brannan et al., 2016). As a mediating mechanism, forgiveness may explain how attachment patterns shape social interest by enhancing relationship repair and emotional integration (Kaleta & Mróz, 2018; Babin et al., 2020).

Given the absence of comprehensive studies integrating these variables in Iranian women, the present research aims to test the model of social interest based on attachment styles with forgiveness as a mediating factor.

Method

This study employed a correlational design using structural equation modeling (SEM). The statistical population consisted of women attending community centers (Sarāy-e Mahallāt) in Tehran during 2021–2022, selected through single-stage cluster random sampling from districts 2 and 4. Based on SEM requirements, 320 participants were recruited, and after removing incomplete responses, 305 questionnaires were analyzed. Demographic results showed that 37% held a high school diploma or below, while 12% had a master's degree or doctorate.

In this study, three standardized instruments were used to assess the main research variables. The Social Interest Questionnaire, developed by *Crandall & Reimanis* in 1976, was employed to measure levels of social interest. The Attachment Styles Questionnaire, originally designed by *Hazan & Shaver* in 1987, was utilized to evaluate different adult attachment patterns. Additionally, the 15-item Forgiveness Questionnaire, created by *Rye et al.* in 2001, was used to assess individuals' level of forgiveness. These instruments were selected due to their established validity, reliability, and extensive application in previous research.

The data obtained from the administration of the questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS-19 and LISREL 8.7 software. In addition, structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to test the research hypotheses.

Results

The findings of this study indicated that significant relationships exist among the model variables, and the fit indices (GFI, AGFI, CFI, RMSEA) confirmed the adequacy of the structural model. Path coefficients showed that attachment styles have direct effects on social interest: the secure style exerted a positive influence, while insecure–avoidant and insecure–ambivalent styles had negative effects. Results further demonstrated that forgiveness plays a meaningful mediating role between attachment styles and social interest. Specifically, the indirect effects were –0.74 for the insecure–avoidant style, 0.69 for the secure style, and –0.46 for the insecure–ambivalent style. Overall, the final model suggests that attachment styles affect social interest both directly and indirectly through forgiveness, and the proposed model exhibits strong and acceptable fit.

Discussion

The findings showed that attachment styles have a direct impact on women's social interest. Individuals with insecure attachment—especially avoidant and ambivalent types—display the lowest levels of social interest. In contrast, securely attached individuals, due to trust, emotional regulation,

and supportive behaviors, demonstrate stronger relationships and higher social interest. Avoidant individuals withdraw from intimacy and maintain unstable relationships, leading to reduced social interest. They often rely on emotion-focused coping strategies and struggle with emotional expression and interpersonal connection.

Results indicated that attachment styles also influence social interest indirectly through forgiveness. Avoidant attachment showed the strongest negative indirect effect, whereas secure attachment had a strong positive impact. Individuals with anxious and avoidant attachment styles have lower forgiveness due to fear of rejection and distrust. These patterns also contribute to lower social interest, consistent with previous research. Overall, insecure attachment is associated with heightened anxiety and avoidance, hindering the development of social interest.

Forgiveness significantly mediates the relationship between attachment styles and social interest, reducing the negative effects of insecure attachment. Individuals with anxious or avoidant attachment experience insecurity, fear of rejection, and psychological stress, which diminishes their social interest. The scarcity of prior studies highlights the value of these findings. Early family environments shape both attachment patterns and social interest development. Therapeutic interventions—such as emotion-focused and behavioral approaches may strengthen attachment security and improve relational functioning.

Based on the results, it is recommended that training programs on social interest and forgiveness be incorporated for couples, and that counselors and therapists address insecure attachment patterns as underlying factors in marital conflicts. Emotion-focused, behavioral, and narrative therapies may help improve attachment security and enhance intimacy and relationship quality.

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