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Attachment Patterns among Middle School Students Who Are Victims of Bullying

أنماط التعلق عند تلاميذ ضحايا التنمر لدى تلاميذ الطور المتوسط

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Abstract:

This study explores the relationship between attachment patterns and bullying victimization among middle school students in Saïda, Algeria. Using a descriptive methodology, data were collected from a sample of (240) students through the Attachment Patterns Scale (Abu Ghazal & Jaradat, 2009) and the Bullying Victimization Scale (Abu Al-Diyar, 2011). The results revealed a strong, statistically significant association between anxious attachment and all forms of bullying victimization. Avoidant attachment was also significantly related to verbal and racial bullying. In contrast, secure attachment showed no significant correlation with any bullying behaviors, highlighting its potential role as a protective psychological factor. These findings underscore the importance of attachment styles in shaping students' emotional responses and resilience in the face of relational stress within the school environment.

Keywords: Attachment patterns; Bullying; Bullying victims; Student.

المخلص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف العلاقة بين أنماط التعلق والتعرض للتنمر لدى تلاميذ المرحلة المتوسطة بمدينة سعيدة، الجزائر. تم اعتماد المنهج الوصفي، وجمعت البيانات من عينة مكونة من 240 تلميذا باستخدام مقياس أنماط التعلق (أبو غزال وجرادات، 2009) ومقياس ضحايا للتنمر (أبو الديار، 2011). كشفت النتائج عن وجود علاقة دالة إحصائية وقوية بين نمط التعلق القلق وجميع أشكال التعرض للتنمر. كما تبين أن نمط التعلق المتجنب يرتبط دالا بالتنمر اللفظي والعنصري. في المقابل، لم تسجل أية علاقة دالة بين نمط التعلق الآمن وأي من أشكال التنمر، مما يبرز دوره كعامل حماية نفسي يساهم في وقاية التلاميذ من سلوكيات التنمر. وتؤكد هذه النتائج أهمية أنماط التعلق في تشكيل الاستجابات الانفعالية وآليات التكيف لدى التلاميذ في سياق التفاعلات المدرسية الضاغطة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أنماط التعلق، التنمر، ضحايا التنمر، التلميذ.

1. INTRODUCTION

School bullying is considered a pressing issue that negatively impacts students' psychological and social well-being, particularly those who fall victim to it. Understanding the psychological mechanisms that contribute to the reinforcement of this phenomenon is crucial for identifying its key causes and contributing factors. While numerous studies have addressed bullying—whether from the perspective of the bully or the victim—they have generally focused on the outcomes of such behavior, often overlooking its underlying causes. To gain a comprehensive understanding of bullying, it is essential to examine various definitions that highlight its harmful nature and destructive effects.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines bullying as a persistent and unwelcome behavior directed by an individual or group toward another person, with the intention of causing physical, psychological, or emotional harm, typically involving an imbalance of power. The organization underscores the profound negative impact bullying can have on the physical and mental health of victims, highlighting the urgent need for early preventive and therapeutic interventions. Prominent scientific bodies have also offered precise definitions that contribute to a clearer conceptual framework for understanding bullying, thereby enhancing efforts to study and address it effectively. For instance, the American Psychological Association (APA) characterizes bullying as “a form of aggression in which there is an imbalance of power and the behavior is repeated, with the intent to cause physical or

psychological harm to another person” (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2004).

Studying bullying as an undesirable behavioral phenomenon serves as a key entry point for deepening the understanding of its dimensions, impacts, and various forms, as well as the underlying reasons behind becoming a victim. A review of the relevant literature and studies on bullying and bullying victimization reveals a general consensus in its conceptualization.

Abu Ghazal (2009) defined bullying as a repeated aggressive behavior that occurs when there is an imbalance of power between two individuals, one identified as the bully and the other as the victim. This behavior inflicts harm on the victim and can manifest in various forms, such as physical bullying (e.g., hitting and kicking), verbal bullying (e.g., threats and insults), or emotional bullying (e.g., deliberate exclusion or inappropriate gestures).

Similarly, Dan Olweus, the Norwegian researcher regarded as the founding father of school bullying research, defines school bullying as deliberate negative actions by one or more students to inflict harm on another student, occurring repeatedly and over time. These negative actions may involve words, such as threats, teasing, or insults; physical contact, such as hitting, pushing, or kicking; or even nonverbal expressions, such as inappropriate facial expressions or gestures, all with the intent of isolating the victim from the group or rejecting their inclusion (Al-Qahtani, 2013, p. 273).

Based on the current study, several operational definitions of bullying victimization and its various forms—namely

physical, verbal, racial, and sexual bullying—can be outlined. In general, bullying victims are defined as students who are subjected to acts of aggression and harassment by their peers in different forms. In this study, bullying victimization is measured using the Bullying Victimization Scale developed by Abu Al-Diyar (2011).

Physical bullying refers to any deliberate act involving the use of physical force, including hitting, kicking, pushing, property damage, or any other form of physical assault. The effects of physical bullying are often visible and observable through injuries such as cuts, bruises, or other physical marks. In this study, physical bullying is assessed using the physical bullying subscale of the Bullying Victimization Scale by Abu Al-Diyar (2011).

Verbal bullying involves the use of words, gestures, or signals intended to emotionally or psychologically harm the victim on a recurring basis. This includes mocking, name-calling, threatening, rumor-spreading, and verbal abuse. Its psychological impact may manifest as lowered self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal. In this study, verbal bullying is measured using the corresponding subscale of Abu Al-Diyar's (2011) instrument.

Racial bullying targets individuals based on their appearance, ethnicity, or skin color. It includes the use of derogatory language, racist jokes, social exclusion, and discriminatory behavior that marginalizes the victim. Its psychological consequences may include feelings of loneliness, social isolation, and fear. In this study, racial bullying is measured using the racial

bullying subscale of the Bullying Victimization Scale (Abu Al-Diyar, 2011).

Sexual bullying is defined as any unwanted behavior of a sexual nature, including verbal harassment, unwelcome sexual gestures, spreading sexual rumors, and sexually motivated physical assault. The psychological impact of sexual bullying may include shame, fear, anxiety, and difficulty forming interpersonal relationships. In this study, it is assessed through the sexual bullying subscale of Abu Al-Diyar's (2011) scale.

There is considerable divergence in interpretations regarding the underlying causes of bullying behavior. Many researchers have pointed to key contributing factors, such as socialization processes and parenting practices, including the nature of the relationship between the child and the primary caregivers (e.g., mother-child or caregiver-child relationships). Psychological and psychiatric theories have long emphasized the role of parenting styles and family dynamics in the development of mental disorders in children. Psychologists have shown a keen interest in the child's emotional and psychological life, agreeing that adult personality is significantly shaped by early interpersonal experiences. These early bonds—often formed with the mother or a primary caregiver—are conceptualized as attachment patterns, which play a pivotal role in shaping emotional and social development.

While bullying is a well-documented and widely recognized phenomenon within schools and broader communities, and despite its far-reaching impact on victims' mental health and academic performance, there remain considerable challenges in

understanding why individuals vary in their responses to such psychological aggression. In this regard, several studies suggest that children and adolescents respond differently to bullying, depending on a range of psychological and emotional variables. Among the most significant of these is the individual's attachment style.

For instance, a study conducted by Osama Hamid Hassan Al-Sufi and Fatima Hashem Qasim Al-Malki (2012), which investigated the relationship between bullying and parental treatment styles among children, found statistically significant correlations between bullying behavior and parenting styles such as neglect, permissiveness, authoritarianism, firmness, and inconsistency. Specifically, children's bullying behavior increased in correlation with neglectful, permissive, or authoritarian parenting, whereas it was negatively associated with firm or inconsistent parenting. These findings primarily highlight the dynamics of bullying behavior from the perspective of the aggressor, while the experience of the bullying victim remains relatively underexplored—despite being one of the most pressing contemporary behavioral and psychological challenges, particularly in school environments.

There is near-consensus among researchers that early childhood experiences constitute a foundational pillar in the development of personality and in shaping how individuals interact with their surrounding environment. Among these formative experiences, attachment patterns emerge as a critical factor influencing the nature of interpersonal relationships, the capacity to cope with challenges, and an individual's vulnerability to negative

behaviors such as bullying. Attachment is considered one of the most significant constructs in psychology, describing the emotional bond that forms between a child and their parents, caregivers, or educators. This bond plays a pivotal role in the development of personality and social behavior.

Reviewing the psychological literature on attachment, we find that the leading founder of attachment theory, John Bowlby, emphasized the biological and evolutionary importance of the bond between infants and their primary caregivers. Bowlby defined attachment as an “instinctive behavioral system designed to ensure proximity and security from the attachment figure (usually the mother) or caregiver during times of threat or distress” (Bowlby, 1969). He proposed that this system evolved through natural selection to enhance infant survival. Based on early interactions with caregivers, children develop what Bowlby termed “internal working models”—cognitive and emotional representations of the self, of others, and of the nature of relationships. These internal models profoundly shape the way individuals form and maintain relationships throughout their lives (Ben Slimane, 2024).

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), attachment is defined as “a deep and enduring emotional bond that connects one person to another.” Attachment patterns are described as “distinctive styles of emotional and behavioral interaction that develop between a child and their primary caregiver as a result of repeated responses to the child's needs” (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2004).

Attachment theory posits that attachment relationships are innate and critical for human development. These bonds not only shape interactions during childhood but also have long-lasting effects on behavior throughout the lifespan. Expanding on Bowlby's foundational work, Mary Ainsworth made significant contributions to the classification of different attachment styles—secure, anxious/ambivalent, and avoidant—through her renowned experimental paradigm, the “Strange Situation.” These attachment patterns may persist into adulthood, influencing emotional regulation and interpersonal relationships. Securely attached individuals tend to be more capable of managing negative emotions, whereas insecure attachment is often associated with increased risk for psychological distress (Fahd, 2022).

Anxious attachment: Children with this attachment style often worry about whether their needs will be met and seek constant reassurance.

Avoidant attachment: Characterized by emotional distancing, false independence, suppression of the need for support, and fear of rejection.

Secure attachment: Children with secure attachment trust their caregivers, feel safe exploring their environment, use the caregiver as a secure base, and actively seek comfort during times of distress.

Previous studies have shown that children who develop insecure attachment styles, such as anxious or avoidant attachment, are more likely to experience difficulties in social adjustment and peer interaction. This raises a critical question:

To what extent do insecure attachment patterns increase an individual's vulnerability to becoming a victim of bullying? (Masoudi, 2024, p. 244).

Based on this premise, the present study seeks to answer the central research question:

- What is the nature of the relationship between attachment patterns (anxious, secure, and avoidant) and bullying victimization among middle school students?

This study aims to explore the relationship between attachment styles and different forms of bullying victimization—physical, verbal, racial, and sexual—in order to understand the underlying causes and consequences of bullying, and potentially inform the development of effective prevention and intervention strategies. The topic addressed in this research remains understudied in Arab and local contexts, with existing studies typically examining each variable independently, or exploring the general link between attachment and bullying, without specifically addressing how distinct attachment patterns relate to bullying victimization.

This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the psychological factors associated with bullying victimization and may inform the design of interventions aimed at enhancing students' social skills and self-assertiveness.

Operationally, the study will examine the nature of the relationship between attachment styles (secure, anxious, and avoidant) and bullying victimization among middle school students. It will also assess

the prevalence of different attachment patterns in the target sample, as well as identify the most common forms of bullying experienced at this developmental stage. The analysis will focus on identifying specific correlations between each attachment style and each type of bullying, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the psychological dynamics that may increase—or reduce—the likelihood of being bullied.

2. METHODOLOGY

To achieve the objectives of this study, a descriptive research design was adopted. Data were collected from a sample of students enrolled in a middle school under the jurisdiction of the Directorate of Education in the State of Saïda. The fieldwork was conducted between March and May 2024. The study population consisted of the entire student body of the targeted school (N = 780). From this population, a random sample of 240 students—drawn from all four middle school grade levels (Years 1 to 4)—was selected.

The study relied on two primary instruments: the Attachment Patterns Scale and the Bullying Victimization Scale, in order to examine the nature of the relationship between students' attachment styles and their exposure to bullying behavior.

Attachment Patterns Scale: This scale, known as the Yarmouk Attachment Patterns Scale, was developed by Abu Ghazal and Jaradat (2009). It is a psychometric tool designed to assess different attachment styles. The scale comprises three dimensions: secure attachment and insecure attachment, which includes anxious and

avoidant subtypes. Each dimension is measured through a set of items that capture various aspects of the individual's attachment tendencies. The full scale contains 20 items, distributed across the three styles as follows:

Secure Attachment: Reflects the extent to which an individual holds a positive view of both self and others. This style is assessed through 6 items: (4, 7, 10, 11, 14, 19).

Anxious Attachment: Indicates a negative self-view combined with a positive view of others. This style is assessed through 7 items: (1, 3, 6, 9, 13, 16, 17).

Avoidant Attachment: Reflects a positive self-view but a negative view of others. This style is assessed through 7 items: (2, 5, 8, 12, 15, 18, 20).

The Attachment Patterns Scale has been previously utilized in Arab contexts, including in the study by Suad bint Khamis bin Rashid (2018), titled "Prevalent Attachment Patterns among Eleventh and Twelfth Grade Students in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate Schools – Sultanate of Oman." In this study, construct validity was assessed by administering the scale to a pilot sample of 30 students. Pearson's correlation between individual attachment style scores and the total scale score yielded a coefficient of ($r = 0.608$), indicating acceptable internal consistency. Additionally, the scale's Cronbach's alpha coefficient was (0.567), self-validity (as an index of reliability) reached (0.752), and split-half reliability was (0.582), reflecting satisfactory psychometric properties for research purposes.

Bullying Victimization Scale: This tool corresponds to the second section of the Bullying Scale developed by Massad Abu Al-Diyar (2011) and consists of 28 positively worded items. It is designed to assess the extent to which students are subjected to various forms of bullying. The scale includes four dimensions: physical bullying, verbal bullying, racial bullying, and sexual bullying.

The scale was previously employed by Omar Jaijaa (2017) in an exploratory study examining the prevalence of bullying victimization among fourth-year middle school students in Hammam Dalaa, M'sila State. Content validity was confirmed through expert review by seven specialists who assessed the clarity and relevance of the items. Additionally, self-validity was calculated using the square root of the reliability coefficient. Scale reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha, with a sample of 75 students, as well as split-half reliability, where the corrected correlation coefficient reached ($r = 0.87$), indicating a high level of internal consistency.

Statistical Procedures: Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The following statistical techniques were employed:

Means and standard deviations to determine the levels of both attachment patterns and bullying victimization among the study sample.

Pearson correlation coefficients to assess the relationships between different attachment styles and the various forms of bullying victimization.

3. RESULTS:

The data were analyzed statistically using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients were employed to examine the relationships among variables.

Table 1: presents the means and standard deviations for each dimension of the Attachment Patterns Scale and the Bullying Victimization Scale among participants:

Variable	Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
Bullying Victimization	Secure Attachment	19.56	4.99	Moderate
	Anxious Attachment	14.49	6.25	Moderate
	Avoidant Attachment	20.12	6.50	Moderate
	Physical Bullying	13.40	4.16	Low
	Verbal Bullying	10.63	4.06	Low
	Racial Bullying	10.32	4.36	Low
	Sexual Bullying	9.50	3.45	Low

Source: Prepared by the researchers using SPSS.

Table 1 reveals that the three attachment styles assessed—secure, anxious, and avoidant—were all present at moderate levels among participants, indicating a diverse distribution of attachment patterns in the sample. None of the styles appeared to be overwhelmingly dominant, suggesting variability in how students relate emotionally to others.

Regarding bullying victimization, all four dimensions—physical, verbal, racial, and sexual—recorded low mean scores, pointing to a generally low level of reported bullying among the sample. While this suggests a relatively positive school climate overall, the presence of all forms of bullying, even at low levels, warrants attention, especially given their potential psychological impact on vulnerable students.

These findings lay the groundwork for further analysis into how different attachment styles may relate to specific types of bullying exposure.

Table 2: presents the overall mean scores and standard deviations for both scales:

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
Attachment Patterns	54.16	11.55	Moderate
Bullying Victimization	43.85	13.37	Low–Moderate

Source: Prepared by the researchers using SPSS.

As shown in Table 2, the general level of attachment patterns among the participants was moderate, with a mean score of (54.16) and a standard deviation of (11.55). This suggests that the sample of bullied students did not exhibit a dominant attachment style,

but rather showed a distribution of scores across the different attachment dimensions. The acceptable level of standard deviation relative to the mean indicates a reasonable degree of variance in individual responses within the sample.

Furthermore, the level of bullying victimization was low to approaching moderate, with a mean score of (43.85) and a standard deviation of (13.37). This suggests that, overall, the participants experienced mild to moderate levels of bullying. The relatively larger standard deviation may indicate that some students reported higher-than-average exposure to bullying, while others experienced significantly lower levels.

These findings imply that even low or moderate levels of bullying may be sufficient to influence how students form emotional bonds and interpersonal relationships. This also suggests that attachment patterns are shaped by multiple factors, not limited to bullying alone, including family environment, peer relationships outside the context of bullying, and individual personality characteristics.

These descriptive findings underscore the importance of conducting more advanced statistical analyses (e.g., correlation testing) to determine whether there are statistically significant relationships between levels of bullying victimization and specific attachment styles, and to explore how these variables interact.

Table 3: Correlation between Anxious Attachment and Dimensions of Bullying Victimization

	Anxious Attachment	
Physical Bullying	0.36**	Significance (Sig.)
Verbal Bullying	0.51**	0.00
Racial Bullying	0.62**	0.00
Sexual Bullying	0.48**	0.00

Source: Prepared by the researchers using SPSS.

The table 3 demonstrates statistically significant positive correlations between anxious attachment and all dimensions of bullying victimization: physical, verbal, racial, and sexual. The correlation coefficients—(0.36, 0.51, 0.62, and 0.48) respectively—indicate that higher levels of anxious attachment are associated with increased vulnerability to all forms of bullying. The strength of these correlations ranges from moderate to strong, particularly for racial bullying. These findings suggest that students with an anxious attachment style are more likely to perceive or experience peer interactions as threatening or hostile, making them more susceptible to being targeted.

Table 4: Correlation between Avoidant Attachment and Dimensions of Bullying Victimization

	Avoidant Attachment	
Physical Bullying	0.07	Significance (Sig.)
Verbal Bullying	0.17*	0.18
Racial Bullying	0.27**	0.01
Sexual Bullying	0.13	0.00

Source: Prepared by the researchers using SPSS.

The results in Table 4 show a statistically significant, positive correlation between avoidant attachment and both verbal bullying ($r = 0.17$, $p = 0.01$) and racial bullying ($r = 0.27$, $p = 0.00$). The latter represents the strongest association within this attachment dimension. However, no significant correlation was found between avoidant attachment and physical or sexual bullying, as the correlation coefficients (0.07) and (0.13), respectively) fall below the threshold of statistical significance.

These findings suggest that avoidantly attached students, who often suppress emotional expression and avoid closeness, may be more sensitive to social exclusion or

discriminatory behavior, but not necessarily more vulnerable to direct physical or sexual forms of bullying.

Table 5: Correlation between Secure Attachment and Dimensions of Bullying Victimization

Significant e (Sig.)	Secure Attachment	
0,95	0,004	Physical Bullying
0,01	0,108	Verbal Bullying
0,75	0,021	Racial Bullying
0,89	0,009	Sexual Bullying

Source: Prepared by the researchers using SPSS.

Table 5 indicates no significant correlation between secure attachment and most forms of bullying victimization, including physical, racial, and sexual bullying. A statistically significant relationship was found only for verbal bullying ($r = 0.108$, $p = 0.01$), but the correlation strength is extremely weak, suggesting negligible practical importance.

In other words, while the result may be statistically significant due to sample size, the effect size is minimal. These findings reinforce the conceptualization of secure

attachment as a protective factor: students who feel emotionally safe and supported are generally less likely to be targeted or affected by bullying, and their coping mechanisms may buffer against its psychological consequences.

4. DISCUSSION:

The findings of this study revealed a statistically significant and robust correlation between anxious attachment and all examined dimensions of bullying victimization, namely: physical, verbal, racial, and sexual. Specifically, the correlation between anxious attachment and physical bullying was ($r = 0.36$, $p < 0.01$), for verbal bullying ($r = 0.51$, $p < 0.01$), for racial bullying ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$), and for sexual bullying ($r = 0.48$, $p < 0.01$). These results, derived from participants' responses on the Attachment Styles Scale, clearly indicate that anxious attachment is significantly associated with all forms of victimization assessed in the current study.

These findings offer compelling evidence that anxious attachment represents a psychological risk factor for being targeted by peer bullying. Individuals with this attachment style often display certain emotional and cognitive vulnerabilities, including low self-esteem, heightened fear of rejection, and dependency on others for validation, which may render them particularly susceptible to becoming bullying victims. Such individuals frequently struggle to establish secure social bonds and tend to internalize negative experiences, perceiving themselves as undeserving of respect. As a result, they are more likely to become socially isolated and less capable of asserting themselves or seeking help when confronted with bullying, leading to increased emotional distress, including sadness, helplessness, and even clinical anxiety disorders (Abu Shannar, 2023, p. 128).

Moreover, bullying is often a covert experience, especially when it comes to victim disclosure. Victims with anxious

attachment are more likely to minimize or conceal their experiences due to shame, low self-worth, or fear of further rejection, which exacerbates internal distress and may contribute to depressive symptomatology. These dynamics are supported by prior research, including the study by Milita Nikiforou et al. (2013), which found that poor attachment quality to both parents and peers significantly predicted both bullying perpetration and victimization. Their moderation analysis further indicated that the strength of the association between attachment and bullying increased with deteriorating attachment quality. Notably, individuals identified as bully-victims reported the lowest levels of secure attachment. Although that study did not specify attachment patterns per se, its conclusions align with the present findings and can be interpreted within the framework of attachment theory and its relation to aggressive behavior.

In contrast, the results also revealed a statistically significant correlation between avoidant attachment style and two specific forms of bullying victimization: verbal bullying ($r = 0.17$, $p < 0.01$) and racial bullying ($r = 0.27$, $p < 0.01$). These moderate yet significant associations suggest that students with avoidant attachment are more likely to be exposed to verbal aggression and racial exclusion, both of which often occur in socially mediated and indirect forms. Meanwhile, no statistically significant correlations were found between avoidant attachment and either physical or sexual bullying.

The pattern of findings may be understood in light of the core psychological traits that characterize individuals with avoidant attachment. As noted by Abu Shannar (2023, p. 229), individuals with this attachment pattern tend to experience low self-trust, emotional discomfort in close relationships, and a tendency to suppress emotional needs. They frequently avoid intimacy, resist seeking help, and harbor deep-seated beliefs that their emotional needs will go unmet. This defensive posture

often leads them to minimize emotional expression and disengage from interpersonal support systems, making them vulnerable to relational aggression, such as verbal humiliation or racial discrimination.

Similarly, Ghemari (2012), in a study conducted on a sample of (491) middle school students in western Algiers, found that peer victimization was widespread and significantly associated with low self-esteem. This aligns with the psychological profile of avoidantly attached adolescents, whose insecure self-concept and emotional withdrawal may render them susceptible to relational forms of bullying while shielding them from more direct forms such as physical or sexual aggression. These individuals may not actively engage in peer interactions that typically escalate into physical confrontations, nor are they likely to report incidents due to their inherent discomfort with emotional disclosure.

Moreover, negative reinforcement mechanisms may be at play. The experience of being victimized may reinforce preexisting negative beliefs about self-worth and relationships in avoidantly attached students. This is supported by the findings of (Akaqnia et al, 2023), who reported that bullying victims tend to hold coherent yet negative self-perceptions, shaped and sustained by repeated aggressive encounters. Such students may avoid seeking support because they believe they are undeserving of help and may adopt maladaptive coping strategies such as social withdrawal or suppressed hostility. These behaviors, in turn, may perpetuate their marginalization and invite further victimization, particularly of a verbal or social nature.

In summary, the hypothesis proposing a significant correlation between avoidant attachment and specific forms of bullying—namely, verbal and racial—was largely supported. However, the lack of correlation with physical and sexual bullying may be attributed to the withdrawn social style of avoidantly attached individuals. Their tendency to evade direct confrontation and limit emotional exposure may reduce their

visibility as targets for direct forms of aggression while increasing their vulnerability to covert or relational aggression.

Conversely, the results indicated that secure attachment style did not show any statistically significant correlations with the various forms of bullying victimization. Specifically, the correlation between secure attachment and physical bullying was ($r = 0.004$, $p = 0.95$), which is statistically non-significant. Similarly, the correlation with verbal bullying was ($r = 0.108$, $p = 0.01$), which—despite being statistically significant—remains negligible in strength and thus practically insignificant. Further, the correlations with racial bullying ($r = 0.021$, $p = 0.75$) and sexual bullying ($r = 0.009$, $p = 0.89$) were both non-significant.

These findings support the hypothesis that secure attachment is not significantly associated with exposure to bullying behaviors. This suggests that students with secure attachment patterns are less likely to become victims of bullying, regardless of its form. Such an outcome may be attributed to the psychological resilience and interpersonal competence commonly observed in securely attached individuals. They typically exhibit high levels of self-confidence, form healthy and reciprocal peer relationships, and are capable of seeking support and expressing emotions openly when faced with distress.

Securely attached children tend to trust their caregivers, explore their environments with confidence, and rely on caregivers as a secure base in times of emotional need. These traits contribute to a stronger social adjustment, which acts as a protective factor against victimization. This interpretation is consistent with the findings of Jammati Nabihah and Ben Ali Rajiah (2018, p. 323), whose study on a sample of (118) high school students revealed that secure attachment was predominant among academically well-adjusted adolescents. The researchers emphasized that academic adjustment involves both intrapersonal harmony and successful social integration,

which are fostered by secure relational bonds.

Similarly, the study conducted by Al-Obaidi and Al-Saadi (2015) on a sample of (400) elementary students found a positive association between secure attachment and social interaction, confirming that securely attached children tend to be more socially engaged. These findings align with the broader literature suggesting that secure attachment enhances emotional regulation, peer communication, and adaptive social behaviors.

Moreover, Nikiforou et al. (2013), in their research titled *"Attachment to Parents and Peers as a Parameter of Bullying and Victimization"*, reported that insecure attachment to parents and peers significantly predicted both bullying perpetration and victimization. While the study did not differentiate between attachment styles, it further supports the notion that secure attachment serves as a buffer against peer victimization.

In summary, the absence of significant correlations between secure attachment and all forms of bullying underscores the protective role of this attachment style. Students with secure relational foundations appear better equipped to navigate the social dynamics of school environments, making them less susceptible to peer aggression and its psychological consequences.

Accordingly, secure attachment provides individuals with both physical and emotional safety, offering a supportive context for healthy psychological development and protecting them from the emergence of personality disorders. Secure attachment has been found to be negatively associated with anxiety, anger, and depression, while positively correlated with higher levels of hope and self-esteem. Individuals with a secure attachment style tend to exhibit greater self-resilience, approach their environment with confidence, and demonstrate flexibility in coping with life stressors.

Furthermore, they possess an enhanced ability to regulate negative

emotions, which contributes to more adaptive emotional functioning. Secure attachment is also linked to higher-quality social relationships, providing individuals with the capacity to maintain lasting friendships and engage in mutually supportive interactions (Abu Shannar, 2023).

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between attachment patterns and bullying victimization among middle school students. The findings revealed a strong and statistically significant association between anxious attachment and all forms of bullying, suggesting that low self-esteem and difficulty in forming healthy interpersonal relationships increase these individuals' vulnerability to being targeted. Additionally, avoidant attachment was significantly correlated with verbal and racial bullying, reflecting the interpersonal and emotional regulation challenges experienced by individuals with this attachment style. In contrast, the results confirmed the protective role of secure attachment, as no significant correlations were found between this pattern and any form of bullying. These findings highlight the critical role of attachment patterns in understanding the dynamics of bullying and offer a solid conceptual foundation for the development of preventive and therapeutic intervention programs. Such programs should aim to foster psychological and social well-being among students within the school environment.

6. Recommendations:

- 1- Promote secure attachment patterns through educational and psychosocial programs targeting children, with an emphasis on fostering self-confidence and providing psychologically and socially supportive environments in schools.
- 2- Integrate attachment assessment into school-based psychological evaluations to identify students at risk of bullying victimization and intervene early to address contributing vulnerabilities.

3- Train teachers and school counselors to recognize signs of insecure attachment and bullying, and to equip them with evidence-based intervention strategies to effectively support affected students.

4- Strengthen school-family collaboration through awareness workshops for parents on how parenting styles influence children's attachment patterns and, consequently, their vulnerability to negative social behaviors.

5- Encourage local empirical research on the relationship between attachment styles and resilience-related behaviors in children and adolescents, with emphasis on larger and more diverse samples.

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