

## **Relationship of Late Adolescent's Attachment Styles with Suicidal Ideation and Resilience**

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The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship of late adolescent's attachment styles with suicidal ideation and resilience. These variables have been examined in various social sectors in Pakistan; the relationship of these variables in educational setting was missing in the literature. A sample of 200 respondents was collected. Age range of the sample was from 17 to 20 years. All were undergraduate students. Three scales were used in the study; Adult Attachment Scale (Collins & Read, 1990), Beck Scale of Suicidal Ideation (Beck & Weismann, 1979), and Connor Davidson Resilience Scale (Connor & Davidson, 2003). Differences on the basis of demographic variables such as gender, socioeconomic status and age were also studied. Data was analyzed through SPSS using Correlation, t-test, Regression and Mediation. The findings suggest that there is positive significant correlation between adolescent's insecure attachment styles and suicidal ideation, both anxious attachment style and avoidant attachment style can cause suicidal ideation, female show more anxious attachment style whereas both gender are at equal verge of having suicidal ideation but the resilience level is higher in male than female, male reflect more secure attachment style as compared to the female. Attachment styles are an important predictor of suicidal ideation. Counseling and therapeutic interventions may help to increase the stress coping skills and to reduce suicidal ideation in the late adolescents.

*Keyword.* Adolescents, attachment styles, suicidal ideation and resilience.

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Attachment is an emotional bond that is formed between a parent and a child. It is a mechanism that promotes survival. It is marked by an individual's wish to remain in contact with the person whom they have developed attachment. This contact results in forming different attachment styles with the caregivers. An imbalance in the relationship with the attachment figure may result in different problems in late adolescents and suicidal ideation is one of them. The main reason of demise amongst late adolescents is the suicide. Different factors are responsible for leading them to suicidal ideation. One possible factor that play role in an adolescents experience with suicidal ideation is their attachment with their caretakers. This relationship between late adolescent's attachment styles with suicidal ideation further depicts their level of resilience (Bowlby, 1982).

Mary Ainsworth and John Bowlby presented attachment theory in 1991, on the basis of which the attachment styles are made. The main focus was on infant and parental figure affiliation, his attachment theory helps in finding the measurements of associations made between the child and parents. Various psychosocial functioning in late adolescents is related to their attachment styles. It shows the aspects of the ways adolescent's process affect in social interaction and is also related to the qualities of their continuing relationships with the parents. The attachment styles explain the troubles in the performance that usually come in the adolescence like criminal behavior, suicidal ideation, and depression and so on (Allen & Hauser, 1996).

Attachment styles are inborn and advances existence for different kinds of the groups since it permit adjustment to the surroundings. According to Tharinger and Wells, attachment style adds to the individual's continued existence by keeping her or him in contact with guardians, as a result decreasing the danger of

harm. These can be secure, insecure- avoidant, insecure- anxious, insecure- disorganized and would affect the child's growth, capacity related for the duration of the existence (Bowlby, 1982; Tharinger & Wells, 2000).

**Types of Attachment Styles.** Following are the types of the attachment styles:

***Secure Attachment Style.*** Securely attached adolescents feel confident about their attachment figure that it will always be available to meet their needs. The caregiver is sensitive towards their needs. Securely attached adolescents are easily calm down by the caregiver at the time of distress. They can easily rely on them (Main, 1990). They tend to have positive view of themselves and their relationships. They get more satisfaction in their relationships than the other people having other attachment styles. They are best able to explore having a secure base (Aronoff, 2012).

***Insecure Avoidant Attachment Style.*** Insecure avoidant adolescents are independent of their caregivers both emotionally and physically. They rarely follow their attachment figure and do not seek them in distress (Behrens, Hesse, & Main, 2007). The caregivers are also usually unavailable for these adolescents during times of distress and difficult times. Close relationships are often viewed as unimportant to them. They deal with their parents' unavailability by distancing themselves and are unable to maintain control of themselves (Main, 1977).

***Insecure Anxious Attachment Style.*** These adolescents adopt an anxious attachment style towards their caretakers. They can have dependent and clingy behavior and can be rejected by the parents as well. This results in failing to develop any feelings of security with the attachment figure. These individuals are very difficult to calm down when they are stressed out. They tend to

have less positive views about themselves. They feel sense of anxiousness when in contact with the parental figure. These individuals exhibit anger and helplessness towards the caregivers and use it as a tool to get their attention (Solomon, George, & De Jong, 1995).

***Insecure Disorganized Attachment Style.*** This style includes those children whose parents neglect or abuse them. Children's needs are mostly neglected by the parents; they focus on their own needs. The parents are mostly unconcerned about the children. This attitude of parents results in the insecure disorganized attachment style in them (Baumrind, 1971; Martin, 1983).

The attachment theory proposed by Bowlby, gives an approach to conceptualize the inclination of the people to build powerful warmth association to the important people and to clarify numerous types of the psychological issues. And the main psychological issue is, "Suicidal Behavior". Fitzpatrick (2005) viewed that suicidal ideation is characterized with considerations and dreams of harming the self; it can extend from the views about dying, serious attempts and making of an arrangement to end the life. This behavior has demonstrations of harming oneself with deadly expectations ending the psychological ache that is intolerable. The outcomes might be killing or attempting to kill one. Interpersonal theory and three step theory of suicide also explain this phenomenon. These theories tend to recognize people who are at risk and also endeavor to clarify why people participate in self- destructive conduct or suicidal behavior. It was developed by Thomas Joiner and is laid out in Why People Die by Suicide (Joiner, 2005; Klonsky & May, 2014).

The inadequate studies in looking at the attachment style's role in the late adolescent's suicidal ideation proposes that the attachment styles might be important in recognizing an elevated risk sample who are at the most serious risks of committing suicide (Adam, 1996).

Adam (1996) conducted a study that analyzed the connection linking a particular attachment styles and a past suicidal behavior. The hypothesis was that those adolescents who neglected to sort out the trauma related to attachment, for example, passing of a guardian, or maltreatment or partition from a caregiver, are proved by their inadequacy in thinking pattern while talking about the trauma would probably have a background marked by the suicidal behavior. They additionally anticipated that distracted adolescents would be more prone to have a background marked by suicidality.

Lessard in 2015 investigated the relationship behavior and suicidal ideation to attachment style in the patients with major depression. It was found that there lies an association of insecure attachment style with the suicidal ideation and behavior. Suicidal ideation and behavior have been suggested to be related to the anxious attachment style.

Studies have analyzed, "the danger of suicide from an attachment point of view", especially in adolescents (Mikulincer, 2012). Seven studies were retrospective or cross-sectional, which found a connection between insecure attachment and suicidal ideation or conduct, for most part in the late adolescents (DiFilippo, 2000). Over a period of two years, one analysis report showed that over 300 suicidal deaths in Pakistan from 35 different cities. The findings showed that men outnumber women by 2:1 and

the majority of men tend to be unmarried and under the age 30 (Khan, 2000).

Researchers gave evidences that there is a major role of attachment styles in predicting suicidal ideation. Studies also gave evidences that the adolescents are at high risk of committing suicide who have difficulty in forming attachment (Lessard, 1998). This study shows that having difficulty in the development of attachment patterns reduces resilience and adds to suicidal ideation and poor adjustment issues (Mikulincer, 2012).

Attachment styles, suicidal ideation and emotional coping styles are linked to the resilience. Insecure attached and repressive individuals employ coping strategies that allow them to develop negative emotions, which seem to oppose the stress adaptive quality of resilience (Karreman & Vingernoets, 2012). The resilience theory expresses that resiliency is determined by both hazardous and protective factors. The presence of one or more of the protective factors can decrease the effects of exposure to the variety of risk factors like suicidal ideation (Perterson, 1995). This theory addresses the strengths that people show which enable them to rise above again. It shows its emergence by expressing link with less emphasis on pathology and more emphasis on the strengths (Greff & Vansteenwegen, 2006).

Various previous studies showed that decrease in the resilience level is linked with the emotions of depression, worry, and mental pressure when they face different life events which ultimately leads them to suicidal ideation. Individuals having secured attachment style have necessary resilience for coping with unlikable happenings so it can help them to cope with other difficult situations as an adult in the future, without any emotional harm. The level of resilience can manage the pessimistic and

opposite effects of an avoidant attachment style on the obsessive compulsive disorder (Wilson, 2004).

According to some researches, late adolescents from low income backgrounds are at specific risk and the rates are as high as 14.5% for suicidal ideation have been accounted for in the children beginning at 9-10 years of age. It has been found that they have low level of resilience. In this particular study, suicidal ideation was connected with the past experience of violence, symptoms of distress and depression as well as in response to exposure to violence (Riggs, 2002).

Females with anxious attachment styles may think that it is hard to shape and maintain strong relationships, since they battle with the poor social or emotional regulation skills. They exhibit threatening and aggressive behaviors and may even regularly experience issues overseeing stress. They may see the world as an unsafe place in the light of their negative early life experiences, and are more inclined to the suicidal ideation. They usually experience trust issues, as they were not able to trust those they depended on for the wellbeing and growing up (Stepp & West, 1999).

The rate of suicide crosswise over different cultures are high in the male then female in Western nations, the proportion is different, while the estimate of attempted suicide and suicidal ideation are more in the female. Justifications for more suicide rate in the young male incorporate more suicidal intentions, implying more dangerous techniques, more vulnerability to stressors and more occurrence of disruptive and drug related disorders, for example, money related issues, lawful challenges and interpersonal misfortune. Likewise, male might have high challenges in talking about their worries and in seeking for help (Mikulincer, 2012).

The study gives a clear understanding of attachment styles with suicidal ideation and resilience among late adolescents. This research may go about as a foundation for the further researches.

In Pakistan both suicide and attempted suicide are on the increase (Khan & Prince, 2003). Over a period of two years, one analysis report showed that over 300 suicidal deaths in Pakistan from 35 different cities. The findings showed that men outnumber women by 2:1 and the majority of men tend to be unmarried and under the age 30 (Khan, 2000). Research on suicidal behavior including suicidal ideation and death in Pakistani adolescents is scarce. This may be due to adolescents having dysfunctional family relations, not having strong emotional bonds with the parents and not getting proper psycho-education about it (Cooper, Shaver, & Collins, 1998). Suicidal behavior has become a significant problem and a focus of attention now throughout the world. Adolescents now days are getting engaged in different suicidal activities which as a result are affecting their personal and social lives. Previously, many studies have been conducted on suicidal ideation in adolescents but only a handful of them shed light on which attachment styles are linked to the suicidal ideation and how their level of resilience is affected by it. So, this leads to a gap and generates research to explore the issue. The present study aims to examine which attachment styles are linked to suicidal ideation in Pakistani adolescents and what is its affect on their level of resilience. This study will help to further build up particular counseling and therapeutic strategies in colleges and universities which can help them to get themselves engaged in different productive activities. This study will also help the parents to better understand their children. This research may go about as a foundation for the further researches.



## **Method**

### **Objectives**

The study has the following objectives:

1. To examine the relationship among attachment styles, suicidal ideation and resilience in late adolescents.
2. To study the impact of attachment styles and resilience on suicidal ideation in late adolescents.
3. To investigate the mediating role of resilience between attachment styles and suicidal ideation in late adolescents.

### **Hypotheses**

The hypotheses of the study are:

1. There will be positive relationship between adolescents insecure attachment style with suicidal ideation
2. Late adolescents with avoidant attachment style will be positively related with suicidal ideation.
3. Female will reflect more anxious attachment style as compared to the male.
4. Male will reflect more secure attachment style and high level of resilience as compared to the female.
5. There will be negative relationship between secure attachment style with suicidal ideation
6. Male will have high level of suicidal ideation as compared to the female.

### **Sample**

Convenient/purposive sampling technique was used to select participants of the study. A sample comprised of 200 was collected. It consisted of 100 male students and 100 female students of ages 17 to 20 years.

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**Table 1**

*Descriptive of Demographic Variables (N=200)*

	<i>f</i>	%
<b>Age</b>		
17-18	107	43.5
19-20	93	56.5
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	100	50
Female	100	50
<b>Father's Monthly Income</b>		
11,000-30,000	27	13.5
31,000-50,000	79	39.5
51,000 and above	94	47.0

*Note.* The above table explains the demographic variables used in the study.

**Measures**

The instruments used for the study are as follows:

**Adult Attachment Scale.** The **Adult Attachment Scale** was developed by Collins and Read (1990). The scale was developed into a series of 18 items. It measures adult attachment

styles named "Secure", "Anxious" and "Avoidant". It consists of three subscales, secure attachment style, insecure anxious attachment style and insecure avoidant attachment style. Each subscale is comprised of 6 items. These items are scored on a 5 point Likert-type scale of range 1 to 5. Score 1 indicates, 'not at all characteristic of me' and 5 score indicates, 'very characteristic of me' (Collins & Read, 1990). The scale describes three attachment styles which are used in the study.

**Beck Scale of Suicidal Ideation.** This scale was given by Beck and Weismann (1979). It consists of 19 items. Scores range from 0 to 38. The scores above 24 are considered to be a significant risk for suicide (Beck & Weismann, 1979). The scale best describes the adolescents who are at high risk for committing suicide.

**Connor Davidson Resilience Scale.** Connor Davidson Resilience Scale was developed by Connor and Davidson (2003). It is a brief self-rated measure of resilience. It has 25 items, which carry a range of 5 point score (0-4) from 0 which shows, not true at all to 4 which shows, true nearly all of the time. The scale is rated based on, how the subject has felt over the last month. The total score ranges from 0-100, with higher scores reflects greater resilience (Connor & Davidson, 2003).

**Demographic Information Questionnaire.** This will include age, socioeconomic status and gender of the respondents.

**Procedure.** The data was collected from different colleges of Rawalpindi and Lahore. The data was gathered by using convenient purposive sampling technique after building an adequate level of rapport with the participants. The issues of confidentiality and conformity to the ethical values were given

proper reflection in this research. The respondents were contacted individually. They were instructed to rate each item according to their opinion and asked not to leave any item unanswered. Participants were allowed to take as much time as they want.

### Data Analysis

The gathered data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 18. Analysis of the data revealed that how different variables of the study interacted with each other.

## Results

**Table 2**

*Descriptive statistics and Cronbach Alpha Reliability (N=200)*

Variables	n	M	S.D	$\alpha$	Ranges		Skewness	Kurtosis
					Actual	Potential		
AAT	18	52.68	8.49	.60	31-71	1-90	-.26	.18
SST	6	17.54	3.80	.52	6-26	1-30	-.05	.16
AVT	6	18.97	4.44	.54	6-27	1-30	.20	.14
AXT	6	16.16	5.07	.68	6-30	1-30	.17	-.47
BST	19	9.81	48.72	.84	0-26	0-38	.61	-.21
RT	25	68.68	193.01	.88	0-98	0-100	-1.03	2.85

*Note.* AAT= Adult Attachment Scale; SST= Secure Attachment Style; AVT= Avoidant Attachment Style; AXT= Anxious Attachment Style; BST= Beck Scale of Suicidal Ideation; RT= Connor Davidson Resilience Scale

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The table depicts that the Cronbach  $\alpha$  coefficient reliability lies within the acceptable range for the three scales and the subscales due to culture difference.

**Table 3**

*Gender differences in Secure Attachment Style, Anxious Attachment Style, Avoidant Attachment Style, Resilience and Suicidal Ideation (N=200)*

Variables	Male		Female		t	95% CL		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD		LL	UL	
SST	18	3.57	16	3.95	2.52	-2.38	-2.29	0.53
AXT	15	4.65	16	5.48	.48	-1.06	1.76	-0.19
RT	71	11.89	65	14.98	3.45*	-10.37	-2.82	0.44
SUI	9	7.09	9	6.90	.05	-2.00	1.90	-
AVT	18	3.80	19	5.00	.68	-.81	1.67	-0.22

*Note.* N= 200. SST= Secure Attachment Style; AXT=Anxious Attachment Style; AVT= Avoidant Attachment Style; RT= Connor Davidson Resilience Scale; SUI= Suicidal Ideation; CL= Confidence Interval; LL= Lower limit; UL= Upper limit.\*p <.05. \*\*p <.01. \*\*\*p<.000.

According to the table above, female depict a higher anxious attachment style (M= 16, SD= 5.48) as compared to the male sample (M=15, SD=4.65). Male have depicted a higher secure attachment style (M=18.6, SD=3.57) as compared to female (M=16.9, SD=3.95). Male (M=9, SD=7.09) and female (M= 9, SD=6.90) revealed same level of suicidal ideation. Male are more resilient (M=71, SD=11.89) as compared to the female (M=65, SD=14.98). And female depict a higher avoidant attachment style (M=19, SD= 5.00) as compared to the male (M=18, SD= 3.80).

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**Table 4**

*Mean, SD,  $\alpha$  and Correlation among attachment styles, suicidal ideation and resilience (N=200)*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.AAT	-						
2. SST	.480**	-					
3. AVT	.642**	-.036	-				
4. AXT	.754**	.086	.227**	-			
5. IST	.895**	.037	.749**	.815**	-		
6. SUI	.216**	.042	.051	.285**	.224*	-	
7. RT	.068	.141*	.136	-.111	.005	-.366**	-

*Note.* ATT= Attachment style; SST= Secure Attachment Style; AVT= Avoidant Attachment Style, AXT= Anxious Attachment Style; IST= Insecure Attachment Style; SUI= Suicidal Ideation; RT= Connor Davidson Resilience Scale. \*p <.05. \*\*p <.01.

The above table shows that avoidant attachment style is positively correlated with suicidal ideation and resilience and insecure attachment style is significantly correlated with suicidal ideation and resilience. The first and second hypotheses are supported by the research results.

**Table 5**

*Regression analysis to analyze impact of secure attachment style, avoidant attachment style and insecure attachment style in predicting suicidal ideation (N=200)*

<i>Criterion Variable</i>	<i>Predictor Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>β</i>	<i>ΔR<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>ΔF</i>
<i>Suicidal Ideation</i>	Secure Attachment Style	.032	.126	.017***	.06	5.804
	Avoidant Attachment Style	.415	.163	.026		
	Insecure Attachment Style	.394	.097	.032**		
	Constant	3.28	3.21			

*Note.* SST= Secure Attachment Style; AVT= Avoidant Attachment Style; IST= Insecure Attachment Style; SUI= Suicidal Ideation. \*\*p <.01. \*\*\*p<.000.

The table depicts that secure attachment style is highly significant predicting to suicidal ideation in late adolescents. Results elaborated that avoidant attachment style is predicting to suicidal ideation in late adolescents. The table also shows that insecure attachment style is moderately significant predicting to suicidal ideation. Results revealed that attachment styles are vulnerable instigated factor to elevate suicidal ideation in late adolescents.

**Table 6**

*Mediating role of resilience between insecure attachment styles and suicidal ideation among adolescents (N=200)*

	<i>DV</i>	<i>IV</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>	$\Delta R^2$	$\Delta F$
Step 1	SUI	IST	.209	.065	.224	.001	.045	10.45
Step 2	RT	IST	.010	.132	.005	.940	.005	.006
Step 3	SUI	RT	-.18	.033	-.36	.000	.129	30.53

*Note.* SUI= Suicidal Ideation; IST= Insecure Attachment Style; RT=Connor Davidson Resilience Scale.

The above table revealed that there is positive relationship between insecure attachment style and resilience. The results show that resilience is not mediating between insecure attachment style and suicidal ideation.

## Discussion

The present research was intended for examining the relationship of late adolescent's attachment styles with suicidal ideation and resilience. The objectives of the study were to find out the relationship of attachment styles with suicidal ideation and its impact on the late adolescents. The first hypothesis stated that there is likely to be positive relationship between late adolescents insecure attachment style with suicidal ideation. The results revealed that insecure attachment style is positively correlated with the suicidal ideation. The findings are supported by different studies in the past. The results are validated by a population based



study that was conducted in 2013, to find the connection between mental disorders, the adult attachment style, and the suicidality. The results showed that insecure avoidant style and anxious had a negative relationship with the quality of life. The findings of the study show that such people have weak coping strategies that might lead them to threaten their mental health and provokes anxiety (Palitsky, Mota, & Sareen, 2013).

The second hypothesis stated that late adolescents with avoidant attachment style are likely to be positively related with suicidal ideation. Hypothesis is supported by the research results which show that avoidant attachment style is positively correlated with the suicidal ideation and resilience. The results are supported by the findings of the study which further showed that avoidant attachment style is also positively related and a predictor of suicidal ideation. This shows that the people in the childhood have no stable and constant relationships between the parent and consider his/her mother as a safer place because later features like inflated self esteem and self view, lacking in empathy, a sense of entitlement and a sense of exploitation are the features of borderline and narcissistic personality that grown up in themselves too (Sharifi & Ahmadi, 2013).

Third hypothesis stated that female reflect more anxious attachment style as compared to the male. The hypothesis is supported by the results which show that female depict higher anxious attachment styles ( $M= 16, SD= 5.48$ ) then male ( $M=15, SD=4.65$ ) in Pakistani culture. Females show more insecure anxious attachment style by observing disturbed family dynamics and show suicidal ideation. They having low level of resiliency are more likely to face anxiety issues like obsessive compulsive disorder as they are unable to handle their stress related situations. It is also found that those having high level of resiliency have high

self esteem, and efficient strategies to cope against difficult conditions. (Cooper, Shaver & Collins, 1998).

Females with anxious attachment styles may think that it is hard to shape and maintain strong relationships, since they battle with the poor social or emotional regulation skills. They exhibit threatening and aggressive behaviors and may even regularly experience issues overseeing stress. They may see the world as an unsafe place in the light of their negative early life experiences, and are more inclined to the suicidal ideation. They usually experience trust issues, as they were not able to trust those they depended on for the wellbeing and growing up (Stepp & West, 1999).

Fourth hypothesis stated that male reflect more secure attachment style and high level of resilience as compared to the female. The results of this study supported the hypothesis and showed that male have more secure attachment with their parents as compared to the female and have high level of resilience. In our culture male adolescents are given more preferences than female which make them more secured and resilient. A male having supportive mother and a functional family is prone to have a more self empathy than one with a problematic family environment, given that sympathy and care have been suitably displayed by the others. Along with these lines, giving direct care and support in times of sufferings, great family connections may affect working by cultivating empathetic inner dialogues. Then again, dysfunctional family relations are likely to result in suicidal ideation, self criticism, negative self dispositions and an absence of self sympathy. Males show high resilience as compared to females. The resilient people can resist and overcome stress factors and anxiety, which are supported by the different observations. This is why resiliency can cause better adaptation and greater

compatibility of the people in different bad living conditions (Cooper, Shaver, & Collins, 1998).

Whereas the culture in which this study is conducted shows that both male and female are at equal verge of having suicidal ideation. They do not have feelings of comfort and peace. They always feel irritated by every family shortcoming. They have that unvarying behavior that makes them not able to trust other individuals or situations. They sometimes even don't have confidence on them (Cooper, Shaver, & Collins, 1998; Steinberg, 2001).

This study found that the attachment styles are vulnerable factor to elevate to suicidal ideation. Insecure attachment style is a moderately significant predicting to suicidal ideation (Table 5).

The findings of this research also showed there is positive relationship between insecure attachment style and resilience. Resilience is not mediating between insecure attachment style and suicidal ideation (Table 6).

### **Limitations and Suggestions**

Present work is an effort done in Pakistan regarding the relationship of late adolescent's attachment styles with suicidal ideation and resilience. This research will act as a ground work for additional research in the field of psychology especially in social, developmental and clinical psychology in order to raise the awareness in people to think on a broad spectrum as far as suicide and suicidal ideation is concerned. It will help the parents to understand their children, to pay attention towards their needs, to help children cope with different stressful situations and to boost their self esteem and level of confidence.

Counseling and therapeutic interventions should be made for addressing suicide in late adolescents. These interventions may help to increase the stress coping skills and to reduce suicidal ideation in the late adolescents. The professionals working with these adolescents should be trained and educated in this field.

Data was collected only from Rawalpindi and Lahore, if collected throughout Pakistan, its results could have been generalized now. Instead of convenient participant sampling, random sampling would have increased the authenticity of results.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

The study concludes that attachment styles lead to suicidal ideation in late adolescents which further affects their resilience level. Both anxious attachment style and avoidant attachment style can cause suicidal ideation; this may be because of the adolescent's today show poor coping strategies. They have no stable and constant relationships with their parents which further result in different personality disorders like borderline personality. Psychological interventions can help these adolescents in enhancing their stress coping abilities and working on the problem solving skills and disturbed family dynamics.

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