

The Influence of Parent- Peer Attachment on Mentalization and Personality among School Dropouts

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Abstract

Attachment to parents and peers is one of the most vital human relations that impacts how an individual relates to oneself and others mentally and it contributes to the development of personality and is also imperative for educational motivation and achievement. The present study aims to explore the relationship and influence between Parent Peer attachment, mentalization and personality among the school dropouts. 90 school dropouts, age between 14 to 22 years who had discontinued their formal education was recruited from Nagaland through purposive sampling method completed the response for Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment, The Multidimensional Mentalization Questionnaire, NEO Five-Factor Inventory. Written informed consent was sought from guardians and participants. Father attachment showed positive correlation with mentalization, ego strength and extraversion. Mother attachment had moderate positive correlation with mentalization, ego strength, relational attunement and openness to experience and conscientiousness personality traits, however was negatively associated with emotional dyscontrol, relational discomfort and neuroticism. Peer attachment showed positive relationship with mentalization, reflexivity, ego-strength, relational attunement, extraversion and agreeableness. However, it showed negative association with relational discomfort. Regression analysis showed that father attachment negatively predicts neuroticism. Mother attachment significantly positively predicts mentalization and conscientiousness. Peer attachment significantly predicts mentalization and agreeableness personality trait.

Keywords: Attachment, Mentalization, Personality, School dropouts

Attachment security in an individual is shaped by positive interactions with responsive attachment figures. The repetitive validation that associates of close relationships will be available when needed creates positive working models for the self and other people (Bowlby, 1982). School Dropouts can be predicted by examining the level of attachment with their significant attachment figures (Ramsdal & Wynn, 2022). In 2009, Sroufe and colleagues reported that school dropouts could be accurately predicted by observing their early care variable i.e. parent child attachment quality, parental responsiveness, environment of early homes at the age of three and a half years old. Reports from literature accounts that, leaving school early was contributed by abandonment and lack of support, separation from parents, lack of positive peer attachment and unsupportive teachers as well (Ramsdal et al, 2018). Further, Sroufe and colleagues (2009) also reported that latent lack of ability was not the key reason for early dropout from educational institutions; rather, school dropouts steadily were unable to meet the demands created by the educational institutions. Reports suggest that educational graduation may not be exclusively related to inherent cognitive abilities but also depends on how motivated children are through support from parent-child relationship (Ramsdal & Wynn, 2022). Therefore, school dropout cannot be dealt with focusing on only one factor alone but, attachment and early care (Ramsdal et al. 2015), low parent involvement (Ramsdal & Wynn, 2022), Psychological ill- being (Parviainen et al. 2020), family related issues, behavioural problems, social factors, academic performance, personality factors (Ramsdal et al., 2013), Dissatisfaction with school (Baker & Maupin,

2009) are key factors leading to dropouts. Thus, the importance of attachment relationships is evident in the process of school dropouts (Ramsdal & Wynn, 2022). The socio- cognitive skill of an individual that describes and identifies the emotions and thoughts of others and oneself develops from the early parent-child attachment relationships (Fonagy & Allison, 2014). Such mentalization skills, although developed during childhood, continue to improve and mature as one attains adolescence (Dumontheil et al., 2010). Mentalization is an essential cognitive activity that helps people manoeuvre through social challenges, identify and adhere to social convictions in different environments (Valle et al, 2015). As individuals mature, social demand tends to increase along with establishing relationships with peers and elders, thus one's failure to meet the acquired development for mentalizing will result in the subsequent instability of their social cognition (Poznyak et al, 2019). As such, deficits in mentalization are identified as an important factor for dropping out of school.

Personality traits specially the big five personality traits have been reported to have significant effects on high school dropouts where different combinations of personality traits have been shown to have an influence on each person's unique dropout decision (Migali & Zucchelli, 2017). For instance, high neuroticism coupled with low or high extraversion and high openness was found to be highly correlated with dropouts developing major depression (Weiss et al, 2009). Introversion characteristic of low extraversion and high neuroticism were also found to be a risk factor for taking decisions to drop out of schools (Migali & Zucchelli, 2017). Further,

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personality traits such as openness to experience and extraversion were also found to have a significant effect on academic underachievement, a major characteristic of dropouts (Hakimi & Livasani, 2011). In the literature so far, very few studies have explored parent peer attachment (Ramsdal & Wynn, 2022), mentalization and personality (Migali & Zucchelli, 2017) among the school dropouts. The associations and influence of parent peer attachment on mentalization and personality among school dropouts have not been reported. Thus, the objective of the present study is to study the relationship and influence between Parent Peer attachment, mentalization and personality among the school dropouts.

Hypotheses

- There would be a significant relationship between Parent Peer attachment, Mentalization and Personality among school dropouts.
- There would be a significant influence of Father attachment, Mother attachment and Peer attachment on Mentalization and Personality among school dropouts.

Method

Sample

The sample consisted of 90 school dropouts, N=46 (51%) Male, N=44 (49%) Female, aged between 14 to 22 years who had discontinued their formal education from high school level. The sample was selected from seven districts of Nagaland i.e. Kohima, Dimapur, Chumukedima, Zunheboto, Mokokchung, Tuensang and Mon through purposive sampling method.

Tools

Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) is a self-report questionnaire that measures the attachment relationship of adolescents with their parents and peers. The test comprises three sections viz. relationship with mother, father and peer. Each section comprises 25 items with a total of 75 items

with each response scaled on a 5 point Likert scale where; 1= Never True, 2= Not Very Often, 3= Sometimes True, 4= Often True and 5= Always True. In the present study, IPPA showed a very good internal consistency ($\alpha = .89$)

The Multidimensional Mentalization Questionnaire (MMQ; Gori et al, 2021) is a self-report questionnaire that comprises 33 items with a response format of a 5 point Likert scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree which covers six dimensions of mentalization i.e. Reflexivity, Ego Strength, Relational Attunement, Relational Discomfort, Distrust and Emotional Dyscontrol. The present study showed a good internal consistency ($\alpha=.77$)

NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO FFI; Costa & McCrae, 1992) is a personality test that measures individuals on five different personality dimensions viz; Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. The test comprises 60 items and responses are based on the subject’s self-reports scaled on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. The present study showed a good internal consistency ($\alpha=.73$)

Procedure

The participants in this study were selected purposively targeting the school dropouts. Prior to the study, informed consent was obtained from all the participants who were above 18 years and for participants below 18 years, consent was obtained from parents/guardians. Some participants were assisted in elaborating and explaining the questionnaires. On an average it took 20 minutes for the participants to fill all three questionnaires. After completing the data collection procedure, the results were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25.

Results

Table 1 analysis shows Father attachment is positively correlated to Mentalization, Pearson’s $r(90) = 0.24, p<0.05$. Positively correlated to ego-strength,

Table 1. Correlation between Parent Peer attachment, Mentalization and Personality.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1 FA	-														
2 MA	.493**	-													
3 PA	.386**	.319**	-												
4 M	.246*	.422**	.374**	-											
5 R	.058	.173	.271**	.539**	-										
6 ED	-.125	-.235*	-.002	-.421**	.251*	-									
7 ES	.214*	.360**	.244*	.721**	.387**	-.173	-								
8 D	-.104	-.070	-.102	-.265*	.259*	.279**	.133	-							
9 RA	.097	.246*	.293**	.532**	.407**	.075	.481**	.154	-						
10 RD	-.193	-.243*	-.219*	-.566**	.006	.462**	-.124	.446**	.100	-					
11 N	-.167	-.331**	-.076	-.375**	.110	.312**	-.307**	.361**	-.120	-.337**	-				
12 E	.282**	.191	.262*	.382**	.214*	-.057	.256*	-.135	.316**	-.169	-.088	-			
13 O	.196	.272**	.207	.178	.281**	.065	.272**	.252*	.179	.020	.144	.259*	-		
14 A	.126	.140	.267*	.314**	.341**	.065	.044	-.177	.066	-.345**	-.107	.148	.080	-	
15 C	.192	.304**	.161	.401**	.199	-.133	.470**	.104	.312**	-.142	-.084	.488**	.547*	.021	-

(FA= Father attachment, MA= Mother attachment, PA= Peer attachment, M= Mentalization, R= Reflexivity, ED= Emotional dyscontrol, ES= Ego-strength, D=Distrust, RA= Relational attunement, RD= Relational discomfort, N=Neurotisisism, E=Extraversion, O=Openness to experience, A=Agreeableness, C=Concientiousness)

Pearson's $r(90) = 0.21, p < 0.05$. Positively correlated to extraversion, Pearson's $r(90) = 0.28, p < 0.01$. Mother attachment is positively correlated to mentalization, Pearson's $r(90) = 0.42, p < 0.01$. Negatively correlated to emotional dyscontrol, Pearson's $r(90) = -0.23, p < 0.05$. Positively correlated to ego-strength, Pearson's $r(90) = 0.36, p < 0.01$. Positively correlated to relational attunement, Pearson's $r(90) = 0.24, p < 0.05$. Negatively correlated with relational discomfort, Pearson's $r(90) = -0.24, p < 0.05$. Negatively correlated to neuroticism, Pearson's $r(90) = -0.33, p < 0.01$. Positively correlated to openness to experience, Pearson's $r(90) = 0.27, p < 0.01$. Positively correlated to conscientiousness, Pearson's $r(90) = 0.30, p < 0.01$. Peer attachment is positively correlated to mentalization, Pearson's $r(90) = 0.37, p < 0.01$. positively correlated to reflexivity, Pearson's $r(90) = 0.27, p < 0.01$. positively correlated to ego-strength, Pearson's $r(90) = 0.24, p < 0.05$. positively correlated to relational attunement, Pearson's $r(90) = 0.29, p < 0.01$. Negatively correlated to relational discomfort, Pearson's $r(90) = -0.21, p < 0.05$. Positively correlated to extraversion, Pearson's $r(90) = 0.26, p < 0.05$. positively correlated to agreeableness, Pearson's $r(90) = 0.26, p < 0.05$. Mentalization is negatively correlated to neuroticism, Pearson's $r(90) = -0.37, p < 0.01$. positively correlated to extraversion, Pearson's $r(90) = 0.38, p < 0.01$. Positively correlated to agreeableness, Pearson's $r(90) = 0.31, p < 0.01$. Positively correlated to conscientiousness, Pearson's $r(90) = 0.40, p < 0.01$. The hypothesis is thus partially confirmed.

Table 2. Regression Analysis summary for Parent Peer attachment predicting Mentalization

Variable	B	Coefficient standard error	B	t	p
(Constant)	69.12	7.56		9.14	.00
Father	-.02	.08	-.03	-0.29	.77
Mother	.25	.08	.35	3.21	.002
Peer	.22	.08	.27	2.67	.009

Note: $R^2_{adjusted} = .21$

Regression was used to examine the predictive relationship between Father attachment and Mentalization. The analysis showed mentalization was not significantly predicted by father attachment $F(3,86) = 9.20, p = .77$ where $p > .05$. The result indicates that Father attachment did not make a significant contribution to predict mentalization. The analysis also showed mentalization was significantly predicted by mother attachment $F(3,86) = 9.20, p = .002$, where $p < .05$. The result indicates that Mother attachment make a significant positive contribution to predict mentalization. The analysis also showed mentalization was significantly predicted by peer attachment $F(3,86) = 9.20, p = .009$, where $p < .05$. The result indicates the peer attachment makes a significant contribution to predict mentalization. The hypothesis is thus partially confirmed.

Regression was used to examine the predictive relationship between Father attachment and Neuroticism. The analysis showed neuroticism was significantly negatively predicted by father attachment $F(3,86) = 3.65, p = .005$ where $p < .05$. The result indicates that Father attachment make a significant contribution to predict neuroticism. The analysis also showed neuroticism was not significantly predicted by mother attachment $F(3,86) = 3.65, p = .89$, where $p > .05$. The result indicates that Mother attachment does not make a significant contribution to predict neuroticism. The analysis also showed neuroticism was not significantly predicted by peer attachment $F(3,86) = 3.65, p = .57$, where $p > .05$. The result indicates the peer attachment does not make a significant contribution to predict neuroticism.

Table 3 Regression Analysis summary for Parent Peer attachment predicting Neuroticism

Variable	B	Coefficient standard error	β	t	p
(Constant)	37.79	4.11		9.19	.00
Father	-.13	.04	-.34	-2.86	.005
Mother	-.00	.04	-.01	-.13	.89
Peer	.02	.04	.06	.57	.57

Note: $R^2_{adjusted} = .08$

Table 4. Regression Analysis summary for Parent Peer attachment predicting Extraversion

Variable	B	Coefficient standard error	β	t	p
(Constant)	14.27	3.91		3.64	.00
Father	.07	.04	.03	1.60	.11
Mother	.01	.04	.03	.33	.74
Peer	.06	.04	.17	1.55	.12

Note: $R^2_{adjusted} = .07$

Regression was used to examine the predictive relationship between Father attachment and Extraversion. The analysis showed extraversion was not significantly predicted by father attachment $F(3,86) = 3.47, p = .11$ where $p > .05$. The result indicates that Father attachment does not make a significant contribution to predict extraversion. The analysis also showed extraversion was not significantly predicted by mother attachment $F(3,86) = 3.47, p = .74$, where $p > .05$. The result indicates that Mother attachment does not make a significant contribution to predict extraversion. The analysis also showed extraversion was not significantly predicted by peer attachment $F(3,86) = 3.47, p = .12$, where $p > .05$. The result indicates the peer attachment does not make a significant contribution to predict extraversion.

Table 5. Regression Analysis summary for Parent Peer attachment predicting openness to experience

Variable	B	Coefficient standard error	β	t	p
(Constant)	15.55	3.53		4.40	.00
Father	.01	.04	.04	.36	.71
Mother	.06	.03	.21	1.76	.08
Peer	.04	.04	.12	1.07	.28

Note: $R^2_{adjusted} = .06$

Regression was used to examine the predictive relationship between Father attachment and openness to experience. The analysis showed openness to experience was not significantly predicted by father attachment $F(3,86) = 2.89, p = .71$ where $p > .05$. The result indicates that Father attachment does not make a significant contribution to predict openness to experience. The analysis also showed openness to experience was not significantly predicted by mother attachment $F(3,86) = 2.89, p = .08$, where $p > .05$. The result indicates that Mother attachment does not make a significant contribution to predict openness to experience. The analysis also showed openness to experience was not significantly predicted by peer attachment $F(3,86) = 2.89, p = .28$, where $p > .05$. The result indicates the peer attachment does not make a significant contribution to predict openness to experience.

Table 6. Regression Analysis summary for Parent Peer attachment predicting Agreeableness

Variable	B	Coefficient standard error	β	t	p
(Constant)	19.24	4.36		4.41	.00
Father	.00	.05	.00	.00	.99
Mother	.02	.04	.06	.50	.61
Peer	.10	.04	.24	2.16	.03

Note: $R^2_{adjusted} = .04$

Regression was used to examine the predictive relationship between Father attachment and Agreeableness. The analysis showed Agreeableness was not significantly predicted by father attachment $F(3,86) = 2.30, p = .99$ where $p > .05$. The result indicates that Father attachment does not make a significant contribution to predict Agreeableness. The analysis also showed Agreeableness was not significantly predicted by mother attachment $F(3,86) = 2.30, p = .61$, where $p > .05$. The result indicates that Mother attachment does not make a significant contribution to predict Agreeableness. The analysis also showed Agreeableness was significantly predicted by peer attachment $F(3,86) = 2.30, p = .03$, where $p < .05$. The result indicates the peer attachment make a significant contribution to predict Agreeableness.

Table 7. Regression Analysis summary for Parent Peer attachment predicting Conscientiousness

Variable	B	Coefficient standard error	β	t	p
(Constant)	11.15	4.93		2.26	.02
Father	.01	.05	.03	.28	.77
Mother	.11	.05	.26	2.24	.02
Peer	.03	.05	.06	.55	.58

Note: $R^2_{adjusted} = .06$

Regression was used to examine the predictive relationship between Father attachment and Conscientiousness. The analysis showed Conscientiousness was not significantly predicted by father attachment $F(3,86) = 3.11, p = .77$ where $p > .05$. The result indicates that Father attachment does not make a significant contribution to predict

Conscientiousness. The analysis also showed Conscientiousness was significantly predicted by mother attachment $F(3,86) = 3.11, p = .02$, where $p < .05$. The result indicates that Mother attachment make a significant contribution to predict Conscientiousness. The analysis also showed Conscientiousness was not significantly predicted by peer attachment $F(3,86) = 3.11, p = .58$, where $p > .05$. The result indicates the peer attachment does not make a significant contribution to predict Conscientiousness. The hypothesis is thus partially confirmed.

Discussion

The present study examined the relationship and influence between Parent Peer attachment, mentalization and personality among the school dropouts. Research from literature reported that family aspects (Mishra & EP, 2014), conflict between parents (Doe et. al. 2022) are significantly correlated with school dropouts. Parental care or its absence also contributes to moderating roles in the relationship between personality traits and school dropouts (Majeed et al. 2018). The present study found positive correlation between father attachment and mentalization, ego strength and extraversion personality trait among school dropouts. Study by Majeed et al. (2018) also reported that extraversion traits were linked to higher likelihood of school dropouts. Another study reported that early attachment (Ramsdal et al.,2015) and Parent involvement (Topor et al., 2010) have a substantial contribution in the graduation and dropout process. The present study contributes that alike father’s, mother attachment was also seen to be positively correlated to mentalization, ego strength and relational attunement, depicting that secure attachment to mothers helps youths who are school dropouts to have positive mental states in terms of thoughtful reflection on one’s and others mental states. Adaptive attachment with mothers also contributes to effectively solving daily problems and ability to attune with emotional and mental states of others (Gori et al. 2021). Present study also found that mother’s attachment had a positive relation with personality traits like openness to experience and conscientiousness among school dropouts. On the other hand, Mother attachment was negatively correlated to emotional dyscontrol, relational discomfort and neuroticism. Similar findings were reported by (Ranson & Urichuk, 2008) where disturbances in attachment i.e. insecure attachment are at risk for negative socio-emotional competence and poorer mental health. Peer attachment showed positive correlation with mentalization, reflexivity, ego-strength, relational attunement and extraversion and agreeableness personality traits. Peer attachment was found to be negatively correlated with relational discomfort, asserting that as peer attachment improves, perception of being misunderstood and damage by other decreases. Contrary to our findings,

Demagnet & Houtte (2012) reported that higher peer attachment was associated with increased level of school misconduct behaviours.

Further, mentalization among school dropouts was seen to be positively correlated with extraversion and agreeableness. Allen et al (2017) also reported that agreeableness in particular its compassion facet was found to be positively correlated with mentalization and conscientiousness personality traits. Conscientiousness trait is associated with goal-oriented behaviours, self-efficacy and thoughtfulness, as such it has been shown to be positively correlated with student mental health (Lewis & Cardwell, 2020). As Mentalization is associated with perspective thinking and attributing accurate interpretations of one's mental states and others (Blakemore, 2011), conscientiousness and mentalization are seen to have positive association. Further, mentalization was negatively correlated with neuroticism which was also reported by Dancy & Reidy (2007) that higher levels of mentalization would likely show a lower trait of neuroticism and vice versa.

Findings from regression analysis showed that father attachment negatively predicts neuroticism personality trait and Mother attachment significantly positively predicts mentalization and conscientiousness personality trait. Additionally, peer attachment significantly predicts mentalization and agreeableness personality trait. As reported in the literature, secure attachment enhances positive socio-emotional competence, cognitive functioning and mental health (Ranson & Urichuk, 2008). Therefore, secure parent peer attachment is an important factor to predict the mental health of school dropouts.

Conclusion

The present study findings align with existing literature that attachment to parents and peers plays a significant role in mentalization and personality traits among the school dropouts. Father, mother and peer attachment was seen to be positively correlated with mentalization, depicting that adaptive attachment with significant others increases the ability of the school dropouts to have positive mental states in terms of recognizing appropriately their own and others mental states. Attachment with significant others was positively correlated with ego strength signifying that, as attachment with parents and peers increases, there is a tendency to increase in the ability of school dropouts to effectively solve their daily problems. Attachment with father was found to be positively correlated with extraversion personality trait, mother attachment was positively correlated with openness to experience and conscientiousness and peer attachment was positively correlated with extraversion and agreeableness. Findings also showed that as attachment to mother decreases, there is a tendency for higher levels of perception of being misunderstood and damaged by others and an increase in impulsive behaviours among school dropouts. Similarly with decline in peer attachment, perception of being

misunderstood by others increased. With decreased attachment with mother, neuroticism trait characterized by poor self-regulation, trouble dealing with stress increased. The present study also showed that father attachment negatively predicts neurotic personality traits. On the other hand, mother attachment significantly positively predicts mentalization and conscientiousness personality traits and Peer attachment significantly predicts mentalization and agreeable personality traits. Thus, the influence of Parent peer attachment on mentalization and personality traits among school dropouts is evident from the present findings where effective treatment targeting improvement in significant other relationships and mentalization can be adopted for better mental health among the school dropout.

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