IJBMC
International Journal of Body, Mind and Culture

Volume 13, Issue 5, Article e2026-1388
DOI: 10.61838/ijbmc.v13i5.1388

Article type:
Original Article

Avoidant Attachment and Quality of Life among Secondary School Students in Baghdad: A Cross-Sectional Correlational Study

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Article history:

Received 17 Feb 2026
Revised 22 Mar 2026
Accepted 01 Apr 2026
Published online 01 May 2026

How to cite this article:
Shalaga, M. H. (2026). Avoidant attachment and quality of life among secondary school students in Baghdad: A cross-sectional correlational study. International Journal of Body, Mind and Culture, 13(5), Article e2026-1388. https://doi.org/10.61838/ijbmc.v13i5.1388

ABSTRACT

Objective: This cross-sectional correlational study examined avoidant attachment, quality of life, and the strength of their association among secondary school students in Baghdad, Iraq.

Methods and Materials: The sample consisted of 400 students from the Karkh Second Directorate of Education during the 2024-25 academic year. Participants were selected through stratified random sampling and included 160 males and 240 females; 160 students were in the scientific track and 240 in the literary track. Data were collected with a researcher-developed 20-item avoidant attachment scale and the 38-item Jamal quality-of-life scale, which covers psychological, social, and school domains. Psychometric evidence for the avoidant attachment scale was preliminary and included item discrimination, item-total correlations, Cronbach's alpha, and test-retest reliability, but no factor analysis or external validation was available.

Findings: Corrected analyses showed that the standardized avoidant attachment scores were centered near the reference T-score and should be interpreted descriptively rather than as evidence of a validated clinical level. Quality of life was above the theoretical mean, $M = 120.17$, $SD = 9.09$, $t(399) = 13.58$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.68$. Avoidant attachment was weakly and positively correlated with quality of life, $r = .215$, 95% CI [.119, .307], $p < .001$. Correlations did not differ significantly by gender or academic specialization.

Conclusion: The findings indicate a weak and theoretically unexpected positive association between avoidant attachment and quality of life. Given the correlational design, aggregate-data reanalysis, and preliminary validation of the avoidant attachment scale, the results should be interpreted cautiously and require replication with established attachment measures and domain-level quality-of-life analyses.

Keywords: Avoidant Attachment, Quality of Life, Adolescence, Secondary School Students, Correlational Study.

Introduction

Attachment theory explains how early and continuing relationships with caregivers and significant others shape emotion regulation, interpersonal expectations, and help-seeking across development (Bowlby & Holmes, 2012; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010). During adolescence, attachment becomes especially salient because young people gradually renegotiate dependence on parents while expanding peer, school, and community relationships (Moretti & Peled, 2004). Avoidant attachment in adolescents is commonly expressed as discomfort with emotional closeness, reluctance to depend on others, suppression of distress, defensive self-reliance, and a preference for limiting disclosure to parents, peers, or school personnel (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 2017).

In school settings, avoidant attachment may appear as limited help-seeking, emotional restraint, reduced trust in adults, weaker perceived social support, and difficulty using peer relationships as a source of support. Such tendencies are important because adolescence is a period in which relational security contributes to adjustment, self-esteem, and school functioning (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Laible et al., 2004; Waters et al., 2000). Reviews and empirical studies generally suggest that insecure attachment is associated with poorer internalizing, relational, and well-being outcomes, although the strength and direction of these associations vary across measures and contexts (Brumariu & Kerns, 2010; Delgado et al., 2022; Dykas & Cassidy, 2011; Mónaco et al., 2019).

Quality of life is broader than psychological distress. It captures adolescents' subjective evaluation of daily functioning, social relationships, emotional well-being, and school experiences. The World Health Organization conceptualizes quality of life as the individual's perception of their position in life in relation to goals, expectations, standards, cultural values, and concerns (Alsadoon et al . 2026; Hasan, 2026; Jones et al. 2026). In adolescent research, quality-of-life and life-satisfaction instruments emphasize multidimensional domains such as psychological well-being, peer and family relations, autonomy, school functioning, and perceived support (Huebner, 1991; Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2008; Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

Studying quality of life, rather than only distress or loneliness, is therefore valuable because students may report acceptable school functioning or general satisfaction even when they show interpersonal avoidance. In Arab educational contexts, research has examined attachment, self-esteem, loneliness, emotional intelligence, counseling needs, and quality of life, but the specific link between avoidant attachment and multidimensional quality of life among secondary school students remains insufficiently tested (Al-Farra & Al-Nawajah, 2012; Ghazal & Jaradat, 2009).

Theoretically, avoidant attachment would usually be expected to correlate negatively with quality of life because emotional distance, reduced disclosure, and lower support-seeking may limit psychological and social well-being. A positive association, if observed, therefore requires cautious interpretation and may reflect measurement features, cultural norms surrounding restraint and self-reliance, or the possibility that a locally developed scale captures autonomy rather than insecure attachment. The present study addressed four questions: (1) What is the level of avoidant attachment among secondary school students? (2) What is their level of quality of life? (3) Is avoidant attachment associated with quality of life? and (4) Does the strength of this correlation differ by gender or academic specialization?

Methods and Materials

Study Design

A cross-sectional correlational design was used. This design is appropriate for estimating associations among variables at one time point; however, it does not permit causal inference or temporal ordering.

Participants and Sampling

The target population consisted of 5,676 secondary school students enrolled in schools affiliated with the Karkh Second Directorate of Education in Baghdad during the 2024-2025 academic year. A stratified random sampling approach was used to select 400 students. Stratification was based on gender and academic specialization. The final sample included 160 males (40.0%) and 240 females (60.0%); 160 students (40.0%) were enrolled in the scientific track and 240 (60.0%) in the literary track. The available manuscript record did not include the number of schools or classes

selected, student age range, mean age, grade distribution, number invited, refusal rate, or whether participation rates differed by school.

Instruments

Avoidant attachment was assessed with a researcher-developed scale containing 20 items rated on a three-point Likert scale (1 = disagree, 2 = neutral, 3 = agree). Total scores can range from 20 to 60, with higher scores intended to indicate stronger avoidant attachment tendencies. The item content was based on attachment-theory indicators such as discomfort with closeness, preference for self-reliance, limited emotional disclosure, and reluctance to depend on others. Because no factor analysis or convergent validity test with an established attachment measure was available, the scale should be considered preliminarily validated rather than fully established.

Quality of life was assessed with the Jamal (2016) scale. The scale includes 38 items distributed across psychological, social, and school domains. Responses are rated on a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Total scores range from 38 to 190; the theoretical midpoint is 114. Higher scores indicate higher perceived quality of life. Reverse scoring was applied where necessary so that all items contributed in the same direction. Domain-level means and correlations were not available in the submitted analysis record.

Psychometric Procedures

For the avoidant attachment scale, item discrimination was examined by comparing upper and lower groups; all items showed significant discrimination in the source analysis. Item-total correlations ranged from r = .437 to r = .712. Internal consistency was high, Cronbach's alpha = .90, and test-retest reliability over two weeks in a 40-student subsample was r = .88. These results support preliminary reliability but do not establish construct validity.

For the quality-of-life scale, item discrimination was examined separately for psychological, social, and school domains; the source analysis reported significant discrimination for all items. Item-total correlations ranged from r = .463 to r = .772. Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from .87 to .91 across domains, indicating good internal consistency. The item-level discrimination and item-total tables from the original manuscript were condensed because detailed item statistics are more suitable for supplementary material than for the main journal article.

Ethical Considerations

The study involved minors and therefore required institutional permission, parental consent, and student assent. The source manuscript stated that approval was obtained from the relevant institutional authority and that participation was voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. The ethics committee name, approval number, and approval date were not available in the source file and should be inserted before final journal submission. Students were informed that they could refuse participation without academic consequences, and questionnaires were treated as anonymous research data.

Data Analysis

Analyses included descriptive statistics, one-sample t-tests, Pearson correlation coefficients, 95% confidence intervals, effect sizes, and Fisher's z tests for comparing independent correlations. The avoidant attachment results in the original file were reported as standardized T-scores with M = 50 and SD = 10; therefore, tests against the reference score of 50 were recalculated and interpreted only descriptively because comparison of a standardized mean with its own centering value is not substantively meaningful. Quality-of-life means were compared with the theoretical midpoint of 114. Statistical significance was evaluated using two-tailed p values.

Findings and Results

The corrected one-sample tests for standardized avoidant attachment scores are shown in Table 1. The mean scores were essentially centered on the reference T-score of 50 and none differed significantly from 50. Because these values are standardized scores, the table should not be interpreted as evidence of a clinically validated low, moderate, or high level. The safest interpretation is that avoidant attachment was around the sample-centered midrange, and the conclusion of “moderate” avoidant attachment should be used only descriptively.

Table 1

Corrected one-sample tests for standardized avoidant attachment scores

Group	N	M	SD	t(df)	p	d
Males	160	50.20	9.80	0.26 (159)	.797	0.02
Females	240	49.80	10.10	-0.31 (239)	.759	-0.02
Total	400	50.00	10.00	0.00 (399)	1.000	0.00

Note. The comparison value was the standardized T-score reference of 50. Because scores were centered on a T-score scale, these tests are descriptive and should not be used as evidence of a validated severity level.

Table 2

Corrected one-sample tests for quality of life

Group	N	M	SD	t(df)	p	d
Males	160	119.48	8.56	8.10 (159)	< .001	0.64
Females	240	120.68	9.26	11.18 (239)	< .001	0.72
Total	400	120.17	9.09	13.58 (399)	< .001	0.68

Note. The theoretical midpoint of the 38-item five-point scale is 114.

Quality-of-life scores were significantly above the theoretical midpoint in males, females, and the total sample. The total mean was 120.17 (SD = 9.09), which exceeded the theoretical midpoint by 6.17 points. The effect size for the total sample was moderate, d = 0.68. This supports the interpretation that students reported relatively positive quality of life, although this conclusion is based on a theoretical midpoint rather than external norms.

Table 3

Pearson correlations between avoidant attachment and quality of life

Group	N	r	95% CI	p
Males	160	.253	[.102, .393]	.001
Females	240	.203	[.078, .321]	.002
Scientific	160	.206	[.053, .350]	.009
Literary	240	.221	[.097, .338]	< .001
Total	400	.215	[.119, .307]	< .001

Note. All p values are two-tailed. Correlations are statistically significant but weak.

Avoidant attachment was weakly and positively correlated with quality of life in the total sample, r = .215, 95% CI [.119, .307], p < .001. All subgroup correlations were statistically significant but weak (Table 3).

Table 4

Fisher z comparisons of independent correlations

Comparison	Group correlations	z	p	Interpretation
Gender	Male .253 / Female .203	0.51	.608	Not significant
Specialization	Scientific .206 / Literary .221	-0.15	.879	Not significant

Note. Group sample sizes were 160 and 240 in both comparisons.

Fisher's z tests showed that the strength of the correlation between avoidant attachment and quality of life did not differ significantly by gender or academic specialization (Tble 4). Thus, the weak positive association was generally consistent across subgroups.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present findings should be read in light of both attachment theory and the specific measurement and cultural context of the study. The first finding was that

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E-ISSN: 2345-5802

avoidant attachment scores were centered around the standardized T-score reference of 50. This pattern indicates that the students' scores were close to the scale's midrange rather than clearly elevated or low. Accordingly, the term moderate avoidant attachment can be used only as a descriptive label, not as a clinically or normatively validated category. This interpretation is consistent with the view that attachment-related tendencies in adolescence are dimensional patterns of emotion regulation, dependence, and interpersonal expectations rather than fixed diagnostic states (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010).

The second finding was that students reported quality-of-life scores above the theoretical midpoint. This result suggests that, at the total-score level, the participants generally perceived their psychological, social, and school functioning in a positive way. This is compatible with multidimensional models of adolescent quality of life, which emphasize that perceived well-being includes not only the absence of distress but also school satisfaction, peer relations, autonomy, and perceived support (Huebner, 1991; Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2008; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). It also corresponds with regional educational research showing that quality of life among students is linked with positive personal and academic resources such as emotional intelligence, counseling needs, and achievement-related adjustment (Al-Farra & Al-Nawajah, 2012; Jamal, 2016).

A key contribution of the study is the observed association between avoidant attachment and quality of life. The correlation was statistically significant but weak and positive. This finding is only partly aligned with the broader attachment literature. On the one hand, it confirms that attachment-related interpersonal patterns are related to adolescents' perceived adjustment and well-being. Previous studies have shown that the quality of parent and peer attachment is associated with psychological well-being, self-esteem, peer functioning, and adolescent adjustment (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Laible et al., 2004; Moretti & Peled, 2004). Systematic and review evidence also indicates that insecure attachment patterns are linked to internalizing symptoms, difficulties in peer relationships, and less adaptive social information processing (Brumariu & Kerns, 2010; Delgado et al., 2022; Dykas & Cassidy, 2011).

On the other hand, the positive direction of the correlation is not the direction most commonly expected from attachment theory. Secure attachment is generally expected to support well-being through trust, emotional disclosure, and effective use of social support, whereas avoidant attachment is usually expected to be associated with lower relational closeness and poorer emotional adjustment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010; Mónaco et al., 2019). Therefore, the present result should not be interpreted as evidence that avoidant attachment improves quality of life. A more cautious interpretation is that the locally developed avoidant attachment scale may have captured components of defensive self-reliance, emotional restraint, and preference for independence. In some school or cultural contexts, these tendencies may overlap with socially valued autonomy and may therefore be reported together with acceptable or even positive quality-of-life evaluations.

Another explanation concerns the total-score approach used for quality of life. The Jamal scale includes psychological, social, and school domains, but the available analysis used only the overall score. Avoidant attachment may relate negatively to social closeness but neutrally or positively to perceived autonomy, school adjustment, or self-control. Combining domains into one total score can therefore mask divergent domain-level associations. This possibility is consistent with the multidimensional nature of quality-of-life measures and with the idea that adolescents' school functioning, peer relationships, and emotional well-being may not move in the same direction (Huebner, 1991; Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2008). Future domain-level analyses may show whether the weak positive total correlation reflects a genuine contextual pattern or a statistical averaging effect.

The finding that the attachment-quality-of-life correlation did not differ significantly by gender or academic specialization suggests that the weak association was relatively similar across these subgroups. This result is useful because it indicates that the main association was not driven exclusively by males, females, scientific-track students, or literary-track students. However, the absence of significant subgroup differences should be interpreted carefully. It does not demonstrate measurement invariance, nor does it rule out more subtle differences in how boys and girls or students in different academic tracks understand

closeness, independence, school satisfaction, and emotional expression.

Taken together, the findings add to adolescent attachment and well-being research by showing that attachment-related avoidance and quality of life are associated in this Iraqi secondary-school sample, but the association is small and theoretically unexpected. The result is best understood as preliminary evidence that interpersonal self-reliance, emotional distance, and perceived quality of life may have a more complex relationship in this context than a simple risk model would predict. Replication with established adolescent attachment instruments, confirmatory factor analysis, tests of convergent validity, and separate analyses of psychological, social, and school quality-of-life domains is necessary before drawing strong theoretical or practical conclusions.

This study found that secondary school students in Baghdad reported quality-of-life scores above the theoretical midpoint, while avoidant attachment scores were centered near the standardized reference value and should therefore be described cautiously as midrange rather than as a validated moderate level. Avoidant attachment had a weak positive correlation with quality of life, and this relationship did not vary significantly by gender or academic specialization.

The conclusion that can be drawn is not that avoidant attachment is beneficial, but that the relationship between attachment-related avoidance and adolescents' perceived quality of life in this sample is small, context-dependent, and possibly influenced by measurement characteristics. The findings are broadly consistent with previous evidence that attachment patterns are connected with adolescent adjustment and well-being, yet they differ from the usual expectation that avoidant attachment is associated with poorer quality of life (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Brumariu & Kerns, 2010; Delgado et al., 2022; Mónaco et al., 2019). For school counseling practice, the results highlight the importance of examining students' emotional disclosure, help-seeking, peer connectedness, and perceived support rather than relying only on total attachment or quality-of-life scores. Future research should use validated attachment measures, include domain-level quality-of-life analyses, and control for demographic, family, academic, and mental-health variables to clarify the direction and meaning of this association.

The study has several limitations. The cross-sectional design prevents causal inference. The sample came from one educational directorate in Baghdad, limiting generalizability. The source record did not provide age range, mean age, grade distribution, number of schools and classes, participation rate, refusal rate, or detailed inclusion and exclusion criteria. The gender distribution was imbalanced and it is unclear whether it reflects the population. The avoidant attachment scale was researcher-developed and had no reported factor analysis, external validation, convergent validity with an established attachment measure, or measurement-invariance testing. Quality of life was analyzed only as a total score despite having psychological, social, and school domains. The available data did not permit adjusted regression modeling controlling for demographic or family variables. Possible social desirability bias, scoring inconsistency, and reverse-scoring error should also be considered.

Acknowledgments

The author thanks the participating students, school administrations, and educational authorities for facilitating data collection.

Declaration of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted with attention to voluntary participation, confidentiality, parental consent, and student assent. The exact ethics committee name, approval number, and approval date were not available in the source manuscript and should be added before final submission.

Transparency of Data

The revised statistical results were recalculated from the aggregate values reported in the submitted manuscript. Raw item-level data were not available in the source file.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Authors' Contributions

Murtadha Hameed Shalaga was responsible for the conception, design, data collection, analysis, and writing of the manuscript.

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