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# The Role of Mentalization in Linking Trauma, Attachment Styles, and Rejection Sensitivity to Interpersonal Relationships

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**ABSTRACT**

**Objective:** The goal of this study was to investigate how trauma, attachment issues, and rejection sensitivity impact interpersonal relationships, and how mentalization plays a role in mediating these effects among both male and female clients at psychology and counseling clinics.

**Methods and Materials:** The current research was a descriptive-correlational study utilizing a cross-sectional research design. The structural model method and path analysis were employed to investigate the impact of the mediator variable. The statistical population for this study comprised all male and female individuals seeking services at psychology and counseling clinics in Tehran from July to October 2023 (Male (%49.7) and female (%50.3)). A total of 191 participants were randomly selected to form the statistical sample. Research instruments utilized in this study included the Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS), Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ), Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (RSQ), Communication Skills Questionnaire (CSQ), and Reflective Function Questionnaire (RFQ). Data analysis was performed in the descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation section using SPSS version 27 software, and path analysis and model fitting were performed using SMARTPLS version 4. Statistical analysis was performed with a p-value of 0.05.

**Findings:** According to the study results, rejection sensitivity adversely affected interpersonal relationships through mentalization (β = -0.087, p = 0.002). Similarly, trauma was correlated to a detrimental impact on interpersonal relationships via mentalization (β = -0.132, p = 0.001). Additionally, research showed that individuals with an avoidant attachment style experienced significant negative consequences in their interpersonal relationships (β = -0.229, p = 0.001). On the other hand, mentalization was discovered to have a favorable impact on interpersonal relationships (β = 0.303, p < 0.001).

**Conclusion:** This research underscores the significance of mentalization and secure attachment style in enhancing interpersonal relationships and brings attention to the detrimental impact of rejection sensitivity and trauma. These results have the potential to assist psychologists and counselors in offering more efficient therapies through a focus on mentalization, attachment style, and minimizing the repercussions of trauma and rejection sensitivity.

**Keywords:** Trauma, Attachment, Rejection Sensitivity, Interpersonal Relationships, Mentalization

## Introduction

Humans have an innate need to form interpersonal relationships for their well-being, which can encompass emotional, social, and cognitive interactions in the forms of friendship, family, work, or love (Araújo et al., 2024). Maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships is essential for mental well-being because they offer social assistance, decrease stress, and increase self-worth. Conversely, unhealthy relationships can result in increased anxiety, depression, and other psychological issues (Chen et al., 2023). Interpersonal relationships play a crucial role in psychological adjustment by fostering social support and resilience. Rather than merely providing external support, these connections actively contribute to an individual's ability to cope with challenges (Zhang et al., 2021). Stronger relationships are associated with higher self-esteem, improved self-perception, and lower rates of depression and suicidal ideation (Zhao et al., 2022).

These connections can also shape trust and communication patterns, influencing how individuals navigate challenging experiences such as trauma in profound ways. Trauma is not defined universally, but according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), it refers to events or circumstances that are life-threatening and have a lasting negative impact on a person's mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being (Saunders et al., 2023). Trauma can impact psychosis experiences, causing them to reflect on past events. Individuals with psychosis are more likely to have posttraumatic stress disorder and other trauma-related mental health issues compared to the general population (Hardy et al., 2024). Exposure to trauma is known to increase the likelihood of mental disorders and related symptoms (Liu et al., 2021). However, a more specific link has been identified between interpersonal trauma and PTSD symptoms, with interpersonal difficulties playing a crucial role in this connection (Hughesdon et al., 2021).

Trauma during critical developmental periods can indirectly affect emotional regulation, social interactions, and attachment patterns. Still, attachment style plays a key role in how individuals cope with trauma and manage interpersonal relationships (Saunders et al., 2023). According to attachment theory, early interactions between children and their caregivers are crucial in shaping emotional development and social behaviors. These early bonds influence how individuals perceive themselves and others, ultimately affecting their ability to form and maintain relationships throughout their lives (Long et al., 2020). Secure attachment, characterized by trust and emotional availability, leads to healthier relationships and better emotional regulation, while insecure attachment can result in difficulties in forming close connections and managing emotions (Bosmans et al., 2020). Research suggests that secure attachment enhances mentalization abilities, which can be an important factor in addressing emotional difficulties associated with insecure attachment styles (Parada-Fernández et al., 2021). Individuals struggling in their relationships often display avoidant attachment patterns, with secure attachment being less prevalent among them (Rasooli, 2022).

Early attachment experiences can increase sensitivity to rejection by shaping emotional and cognitive patterns. This heightened sensitivity often leads individuals to expect and react more intensely to rejection, which may provoke hostile responses and exacerbate the experience by reinforcing underlying fears (Mishra & Allen, 2023). Research indicates that a mentalization network plays a role in how we perceive the pain of social rejection, as understanding the thoughts and feelings of others can help individuals recognize and process rejection (Sahi & Eisenberger, 2021). Research suggests that rejection sensitivity impacts both interpersonal relationships and can result in the development of unhealthy coping mechanisms (Hou & Li, 2021). Additionally, another study highlighted how difficulties in emotional regulation and mentalization can impact rejection sensitivity by compromising the ability to navigate rejection scenarios and distorting interpretations of others' mental states (Ramadas et al., 2024).

Trauma, attachment style, and rejection sensitivity all have unique impacts on interpersonal relationships, but what connects these factors is how individuals process their own and others' experiences mentally. Mentalization, which involves understanding and interpreting mental states, plays a crucial role in this context, and a lack of mentalization can lead to susceptibility to personality disorders (Borroni et al., 2024). People who have gone through trauma often find it difficult to reflect on their experiences, manage their

emotions, and regulate their feelings. These challenges are believed to result from disruptions in the mentalization process, which involves interpreting and reflecting on one's own and others' thoughts, feelings, desires, and intentions (Oehlman Forbes et al., 2021). Research indicates that dysfunctional mentalization is correlated to difficulties in emotion regulation and interpersonal interactions (Kumpasoğlu et al., 2025). The study also suggests that interpersonal dysfunction is associated with cognitive deficits such as over-mentalization, under-mentalization, and lack of mental abilities (Borroni et al., 2024).

Interpersonal relationships are fundamental to mental health and overall well-being, with factors such as trauma, attachment styles, and rejection sensitivity playing a crucial role in shaping these connections. While previous research has explored these factors individually, little is known about their interactive effects, particularly through the mediating role of mentalization. This gap in the literature limits our understanding of how these psychological mechanisms collectively influence interpersonal functioning, especially in individuals seeking psychological and counseling services. Given the importance of interpersonal relationships in therapeutic contexts, addressing this gap is essential for developing more effective interventions tailored to individuals struggling with trauma- and attachment-related difficulties. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the interplay between trauma, attachment styles, and rejection sensitivity, while also assessing the mediating role of mentalization among men and women attending psychological and counseling clinics. By doing so, it seeks to enhance our understanding of the psychological processes underlying interpersonal relationships and contribute to more targeted therapeutic approaches. Figure 1 illustrates the research model.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual framework of the research*
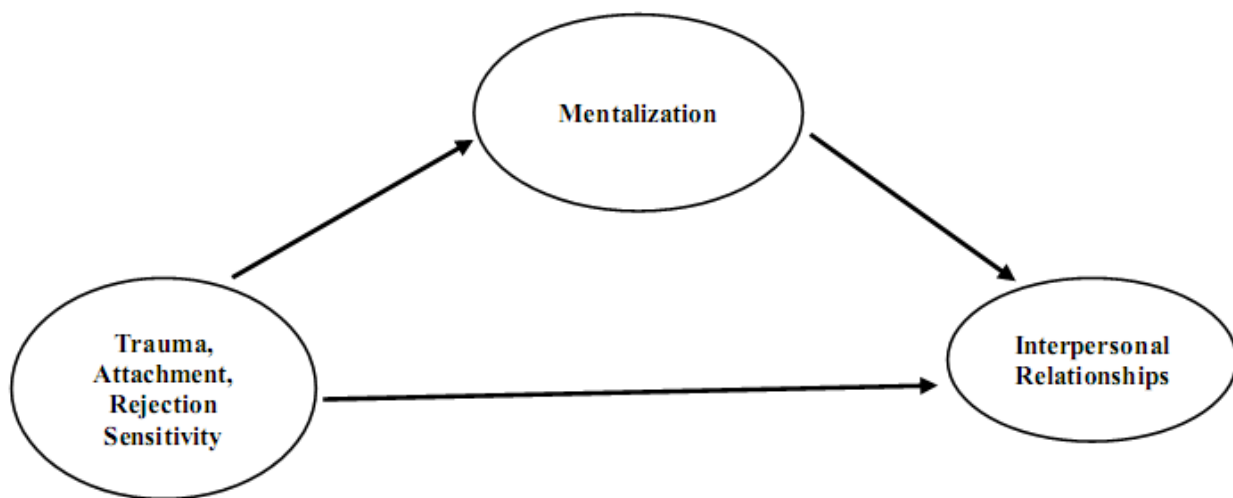


## Methods and Materials

### Study Design and Participants

The current research conducted was a descriptive-correlational study utilizing a cross-sectional research design. The structural model method and path analysis were employed to investigate the impact of the mediating variable. Trauma, attachment, and rejection sensitivity were viewed as independent variables, interpersonal relationships as the dependent variable, and mentalization as the mediating variable. The statistical population consisted of individuals seeking therapy in psychology and counseling clinics in Tehran from July to October 2023. A sample of 191 participants was randomly selected. The sample size adequacy was determined using Cohen's formula from 2013, considering factors such as observed and latent variables, anticipated effect size, and desired probability and statistical power levels (Cohen, 2013). With an anticipated effect size of 0.3, a desired statistical power

level of 0.8, 7 latent variables, 90 observed variables, and a probability level of 0.05, the researcher calculated a sample size of 170 individuals. To account for potential attrition within the sample group, the researcher decided to include 200 participants in the study. The study's eligibility requirements involved having a history of psychological counseling at counseling clinics, providing informed consent to participate, accurately completing questionnaires, and possessing the necessary literacy and comprehension skills. Those who refused to continue participating had a physical or mental condition hindering their ability to respond, or failed to answer more than seven questionnaire items, were excluded from the study and withdrawn.

The research process started with obtaining necessary permits from the researcher's university to conduct the study. The researchers then visited six counseling centers in Tehran, keeping the names confidential to protect privacy. These centers were chosen using a convenience sampling method due to the possibility of collaborating with them, as many centers were hesitant to cooperate. After the visit, the researchers collaborated with the management of the counseling centers to continue with the research. An announcement about the study was then shared with clients who had a counseling file through the centers' websites and information channels, as well as online and social networks. Participants were randomly selected from those who responded to the announcement using a random number table. The communication, participant selection, and questionnaire responses were all conducted online over three months. However, due to a lack of cooperation from many individuals, achieving the required sample size was challenging. At the conclusion, 191 out of 200 completed questionnaires were used, with nine questionnaires being excluded due to incomplete or intentionally erroneous responses. Various demographic variables and psychological factors such as trauma, attachment, rejection sensitivity, interpersonal relationships, and mentalization were assessed online by all participants. On average, each participant spent 40 minutes completing the questionnaires. Participants needed to fill out an online consent form before receiving the questionnaires, which highlighted their voluntary involvement and the ability to opt out of the study at any time. Furthermore, it was clarified that the evaluations did not include any personal identifying details.

*Instruments*

**Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS):** Collins developed an 18-item questionnaire in 1996 to evaluate attachment styles using a Likert scale (Collins, 1996). Each question is rated from 1 to 5, with 1 representing strong disagreement and 5 representing strong agreement. The questionnaire categorizes attachment styles into secure (1,8,9,10,14,17), avoidant (3,4,7,15,16,18), and anxious (2,5,6,11,12,13). Test results determine the attachment style based on the total scores received. A higher score in each category indicates a stronger level of attachment in the individual. The scale's creators reported the scale's reliability based on a two-month test-retest method to be between 0.69 and 0.75. A study in Iran found Cronbach's alpha values for secure, avoidant, and anxious attachment to be 0.81, 0.78, and 0.85, respectively (Seyed Hashemi et al., 2022). In the current research, the researcher calculated Cronbach's alpha values of 0.98, 0.79, and 0.73 for the closeness, dependent, and anxiety attachment style components, respectively.

**Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ):** Bernstein developed a self-report questionnaire in 2003 to assess trauma in individuals (Bernstein et al., 2003). Originally, the questionnaire consisted of 28 questions and used a scale of 1 to 5 to measure responses. Scores on this scale ranged from 0 to 24. In this study, only questions related to pessimism were used. The questionnaire in Iran showed a reliability of 0.7 based on test-retest analysis (Behrouzi et al., 2023). The researcher also determined a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.793. The Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ) evaluates five different types of trauma and maltreatment: sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, emotional neglect, and physical neglect. Scores on each subscale range from 5 to 25, while the total score for the questionnaire ranges from 25 to 125. A higher score indicates a higher level of trauma experienced by the individual. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the CTQ ranged between 0.86 and 0.95, with concurrent validity reported to be between 0.59 and 0.78. In a different research study carried out in Iran, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.72 was determined (Behrouzi et al., 2023). In the current study, the investigator found a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82.

**Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (RSQ):** The questionnaire created by Downey and Feldman in 1996 aims to assess an individual's rejection sensitivity and anxious expectations about rejection (Downey & Feldman, 1996). It consists of 18 items rated on a six-point Likert scale from 1 to 6. Downey and Feldman's study revealed a single general factor accounting for 27% of the variance. The scale developers obtained a reliability of the scale between 0.87 and 0.90. They also obtained an internal consistency of 0.92. A study conducted in Iran demonstrated a high internal consistency reliability (α = 0.83) and confirmed face and content validity with the input of experts (Ebrahimi & Mousavian Khatir, 2023). In the current investigation, the researcher achieved a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.71.

**Communication Skills Questionnaire (CSQ):** In 1990, Burton created a questionnaire to assess communication skills and interpersonal relationships among people (Burton, 1990). The questionnaire consists of 18 items rated on a five-point Likert scale, with scores ranging from 1 to 5. The total score can range from 18 to 90, with a higher score indicating better communication skills. A study in Iran confirmed the face and content validity of the questionnaire, with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.81 (Hosseini et al., 2014). In the current study, the researcher found a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.91.

**Reflective Function Questionnaire (RFQ):** Ha and colleagues created a self-report questionnaire with eight items in 2013 (Ha et al., 2013). This questionnaire measures reflective functioning through two dimensions: mental states of certainty and uncertainty. Participants use a scale from strongly disagree (0) to agree (6) to respond to the questions. A higher score indicates greater mentalization in the individual. The

internal consistency of the questionnaire ranges between 0.63 and 0.67. The content validity of the questionnaire has been verified with a CVR score of 0.74. A study in Iran found a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.78 (Asadi et al., 2022), while the current study obtained a value of 0.82 for Cronbach's alpha.

*Data Analysis*

The information gathered from the study was assessed utilizing SPSS version 27 software and SMARTPLS version 4 software, along with the structural model approach. Statistical results were deemed significant at the 0.05 level. Descriptive statistics were analyzed using SPSS software in the research. The method of structural modeling, combined with the partial least squares approach, was used to assess the path coefficients and the intermediary variable. Furthermore, the researcher employed the bootstrap technique to determine the model's significance. The Sobel test was used to analyze the importance of the intermediate variables.

## Findings and Results

Initially, the researcher analyzed the descriptive statistics of the variables in the study. The participants were segregated based on gender into male (49.7%) and female (50.3%) groups. Likewise, the participants were categorized based on marital status into married (26.2%) and single (73.8%) groups. Furthermore, the participants were classified into three age groups: 20-25 years (61.8%), 25-30 years (30.4%), and 30-35 years (7.9%).

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Variables*

| Variables | Groups | F | % | N | Middle |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Man | 95 | 49.7 | 191 | 2 |
| | Female | 96 | 50.3 | | |
| Marital Status | Married | 50 | 26.2 | 191 | 2 |
| | Single | 141 | 73.8 | | |
| | Total | 191 | 100.0 | | |
| Education | Undergraduate | 155 | 81.2 | 191 | 1 |
| | Master's Degree | 36 | 18.8 | | |
| Age | 20-25 | 118 | 61.8 | 191 | 1 |
| | 25-30 | 58 | 30.4 | | |
| | 30-35 | 15 | 7.9 | | |

Table 2 displays the mean scores of the research factors.

**Table 2**

*Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables*

| Variables | N | M | SD | MIN | MAX | Skewness | Kurtosis | Shapiro-Wilk | P-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Interpersonal Relationships | 191 | 59.885 | 8.528 | 42 | 75 | 0.120 | -0.962 | 0.964 | < .001 |
| Secure Attachment Style | 191 | 19.052 | 3.819 | 10 | 26 | 0.040 | -0.934 | 0.955 | < .001 |
| Avoidant Attachment Style | 191 | 20.325 | 4.043 | 10 | 26 | -0.848 | 0.127 | 0.907 | < .001 |
| Anxious Attachment Style | 191 | 19.906 | 4.476 | 10 | 26 | -0.547 | -0.763 | 0.922 | < .001 |
| Trauma | 191 | 53.518 | 9.937 | 35 | 74 | -0.072 | -0.953 | 0.964 | < .001 |
| Rejection Sensitivity | 191 | 52.901 | 4.187 | 47 | 65 | 0.981 | 0.690 | 0.917 | < .001 |
| Mentalization | 191 | 35.911 | 3.848 | 24 | 42 | -0.707 | 0.099 | 0.941 | < .001 |

Based on the average of the variables Secure Attachment Style, Avoidant Attachment Style, and Anxious Attachment Style, it can be confirmed that the level of attachment dimensions of the participants was high. Similarly, the level of Trauma in the participants was average. The level of Rejection Sensitivity and Mentalization in the participants was above average. The researcher then proceeded to analyze the test assumptions. The Shapiro-Wilk test was utilized to evaluate the normality of the distribution of the variables under study. Since the test yielded significant results for the variables, it indicated that they did not follow a normal distribution. As a result, the model analysis was carried out using the SMARTPLS software. The researcher used random sampling as planned. The sample size of 191 individuals was deemed adequate for running the structural model using the partial least squares method. Subsequently, the researcher examined the Pearson correlation matrix of the research variable.

**Table 3**

*Correlation Matrix between Research Variables*

| Row | Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | P-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Interpersonal Relationships | — | | | | | | | p< 0.001 |
| 2 | Secure Attachment Style | 0.648 | — | | | | | | p< 0.001 |
| 3 | Avoidant Attachment Style | -0.504 | -0.256 | — | | | | | p< 0.001 |
| 4 | Anxious Attachment Style | -0.525 | -0.369 | 0.739 | — | | | | p< 0.001 |
| 5 | Trauma | -0.657 | -0.573 | 0.299 | 0.382 | — | | | p< 0.001 |
| 6 | Rejection Sensitivity | -0.361 | -0.262 | 0.067 | -0.006 | 0.298 | — | | p< 0.001 |
| 7 | Mentalization | 0.691 | 0.511 | -0.291 | -0.315 | -0.645 | -0.462 | — | p< 0.001 |

According to the data in Table 3, there is a significant correlation between the research variables (p<0.001). Pearson's correlation coefficient indicates a significant negative relationship between the interpersonal relationships variable and the avoidant attachment style, anxious attachment style, trauma, and rejection sensitivity variables (p<0.001). Conversely, there is a significant positive relationship between the interpersonal relationships variable and the secure attachment style and mentalization variables (p<0.001). The path coefficients and significance of the realization model are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Direct and Indirect Coefficients between Research Variables and Significance*

| Path between Variables | Path | SE | P-value | T-value | Result |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Anxious Attachment Style -> Interpersonal Relationships | -0.108 | 0.063 | 0.084 | 1.729 | Rejection |
| Anxious Attachment Style -> Mentalization | -0.040 | 0.073 | 0.586 | 0.544 | Rejection |
| Avoidant Attachment Style -> Interpersonal Relationships | -0.207 | 0.061 | 0.001 | 3.387 | Confirmation |
| Avoidant Attachment Style -> Mentalization | -0.074 | 0.070 | 0.294 | 1.049 | Rejection |
| Mentalization -> Interpersonal Relationships | 0.303 | 0.071 | p<0.001 | 4.293 | Confirmation |
| Secure Attachment Style -> Interpersonal Relationships | 0.278 | 0.063 | p<0.001 | 4.438 | Confirmation |
| Secure Attachment Style -> Mentalization | 0.154 | 0.065 | 0.017 | 2.383 | Confirmation |
| Rejection Sensitivity -> Interpersonal Relationships | -0.083 | 0.048 | 0.087 | 1.714 | Rejection |
| Rejection Sensitivity -> Mentalization | -0.288 | 0.055 | p<0.001 | 5.254 | Confirmation |
| Trauma -> Interpersonal Relationships | -0.174 | 0.078 | 0.025 | 2.244 | Confirmation |
| Trauma -> Mentalization | -0.434 | 0.063 | p<0.001 | 6.903 | Confirmation |
| Indirect Effects | | | | | |
| Secure Attachment Style -> Mentalization -> Interpersonal Relationships | 0.047 | 0.025 | 0.057 | 1.903 | Rejection |
| Rejection Sensitivity -> Mentalization -> Interpersonal Relationships | -0.087 | 0.029 | 0.002 | 3.030 | Confirmation |
| Anxious Attachment Style -> Mentalization -> Interpersonal Relationships | -0.012 | 0.023 | 0.597 | 0.529 | Rejection |
| Trauma -> Mentalization -> Interpersonal Relationships | -0.132 | 0.040 | 0.001 | 3.251 | Confirmation |
| Avoidant Attachment Style -> Mentalization -> Interpersonal Relationships | -0.022 | 0.021 | 0.292 | 1.055 | Rejection |
| Total Effects | | | | | |
| Anxious Attachment Style -> Interpersonal Relationships | -0.121 | 0.069 | 0.081 | 1.746 | Rejection |
| Anxious Attachment Style -> Mentalization | -0.040 | 0.073 | 0.586 | 0.544 | Rejection |
| Avoidant Attachment Style -> Interpersonal Relationships | -0.229 | 0.067 | 0.001 | 3.431 | Confirmation |
| Avoidant Attachment Style -> Mentalization | -0.074 | 0.070 | 0.294 | 1.049 | Rejection |
| Mentalization -> Interpersonal Relationships | 0.303 | 0.071 | 0.000 | 4.293 | Confirmation |
| Secure Attachment Style -> Interpersonal Relationships | 0.325 | 0.063 | 0.000 | 5.116 | Confirmation |
| Secure Attachment Style -> Mentalization | 0.154 | 0.065 | 0.017 | 2.383 | Confirmation |
| Rejection Sensitivity -> Interpersonal Relationships | -0.170 | 0.049 | 0.001 | 3.457 | Confirmation |
| Rejection Sensitivity -> Mentalization | -0.288 | 0.055 | 0.000 | 5.254 | Confirmation |
| Trauma -> Interpersonal Relationships | -0.306 | 0.073 | 0.000 | 4.206 | Confirmation |
| Trauma -> Mentalization | -0.434 | 0.063 | 0.000 | 6.903 | Confirmation |

**Figure 2**

*Path Coefficients between Variables and P-value*
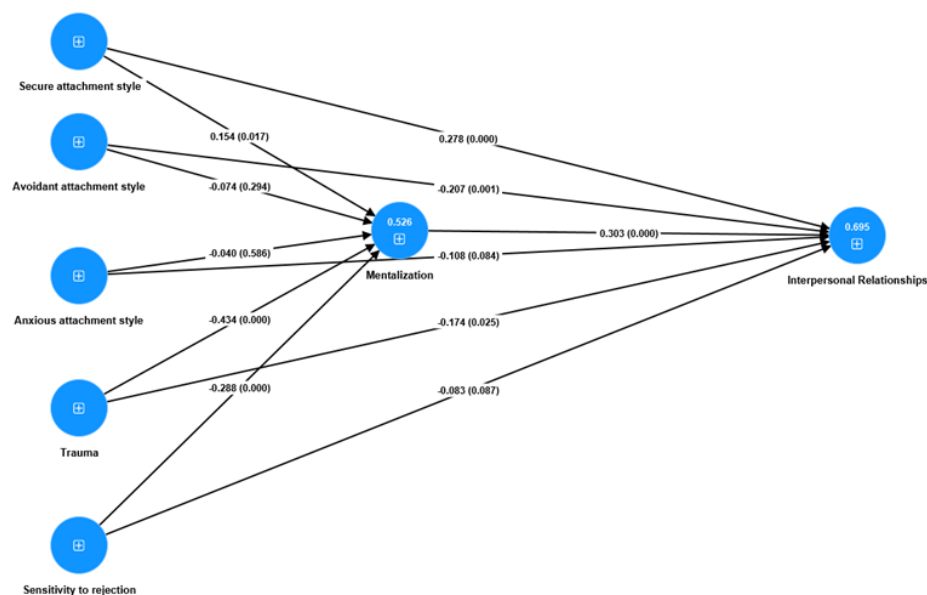
According to the information presented in Table 4 and Figure 2, rejection sensitivity negatively impacts interpersonal relationships through mentalization (β= -0.087, p= 0.002). Similarly, trauma also has a negative effect on interpersonal relationships through mentalization (β= -0.132, p= 0.001). In addition, avoidant attachment style significantly influences interpersonal relationships negatively (β= -0.229, p= 0.001). On the other hand, mentalization has a positive impact on interpersonal relationships (β= 0.303, p<0.001). Secure attachment style contributes positively to both interpersonal relationships (β= 0.325, p<0.001) and mentalization (β= 0.154, p= 0.017). Furthermore, rejection sensitivity shows a negative effect on both Interpersonal relationships (β= -0.170, p=0.001) and mentalization (β= -0.288, p<0.001). Similarly, trauma negatively affects both interpersonal relationships (β= -0.306, p=0.001) and mentalization (β= -0.434, p<0.001). However, in terms of overall effects, the Anxious Attachment Style variable did not have a significant effect on Interpersonal Relationships (β= -0.121, p=0.081). Similarly, the Anxious Attachment Style variable did not have a significant effect on Mentalization (β= -0.040, p= 0.586). Similarly, the Avoidant Attachment Style variable did not have a significant effect on Mentalization (β= -0.074, p= 0.294). To analyze

the significance of the mediator variable, the researcher utilized the Sobel test following a specific formula. A Z value exceeding 1.96 in the Sobel test indicates a significant mediating effect of a variable at a 95 percent confidence level.

$$Z - value = \frac{a * b}{\sqrt{(b^2 * s_a^2) + (a^2 * s_b^2) + (s_a^2 * s_b^2)}}$$

The Z score for the variable of mentalization exceeded 1.96. Based on the results from the Sobel test, it can be inferred that the mediator variable in the study holds significance. The researcher also examined the coefficient of determination of endogenous variables and the R-squared value for exogenous variables in the study in Table 5. Based on the results, it can be confirmed that the coefficient of determination of the dependent variables of the model is moderate and the model can explain 68.5 percent of the variance of the Interpersonal Relationships variable. Similarly, the R-squared value for the independent variables was weak. However, it had significant effects on the dependent variables. Trauma had the greatest effect on Mentalization.

**Table 5**

*coefficient of determination of the model and R-squared*

| Variables | R-square | R-square adjusted |
|---|---|---|
| Mentalization | 0.526 | 0.513 |
| Interpersonal Relationships | 0.695 | 0.685 |
| f-square | | |
| | Mentalization | Relationships |
| Trauma | 0.241 | 0.049 |
| Rejection Sensitivity | 0.151 | 0.017 |
| Secure attachment style | 0.031 | 0.155 |
| Avoidant attachment style | 0.005 | 0.063 |
| Anxious attachment style | 0.001 | 0.015 |

The researcher assessed the reliability and validity of the model in Table 6.

**Table 6**

*Checking the Reliability and Validity of the Research Model*

| Variables | Cronbach's Alpha | Composite Reliability | AVE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Interpersonal Relationships | 0.91 | 0.93 | 0.68 |
| Secure attachment style | 0.98 | 0.98 | 0.67 |
| Avoidant attachment style | 0.79 | 0.88 | 0.66 |
| Anxious attachment style | 0.73 | 0.74 | 0.56 |
| Trauma | 0.82 | 0.83 | 0.53 |
| Rejection Sensitivity | 0.71 | 0.76 | 0.56 |
| Mentalization | 0.82 | 0.84 | 0.51 |

Table 6 demonstrates that the variables had Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability scores exceeding 0.7. The average variance extracted index was above 0.5, confirming the convergent validity of the model. Therefore, the accuracy and effectiveness of the model were confirmed. Additionally, the SRMR index yielded a value of 0.024, indicating a good model fit as it was less than 0.8. Furthermore, blindfolding was utilized by the researcher to assess the model's predictive capability for the research variable. $Q^2$ values greater than zero suggest a strong model fit. The $Q^2$ values were 0.668 for the Interpersonal Relationships variable and 0.513 for the Mentalization variable, confirming the model's fit.

### Discussion and Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to explore the connection between trauma, attachment, rejection sensitivity, interpersonal relationships, and how mentalization plays a role in males and females seeking help from psychology and counseling clinics. The findings of the research show that mentalization has a positive impact on interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, having an avoidant attachment style has a negative effect on interpersonal relationships, while a secure attachment style enhances mentalization and interpersonal relationships. Rejection sensitivity and trauma are found to have detrimental effects on interpersonal relationships and mentalization, and they ultimately impact interpersonal relationships through mentalization.

The current study findings suggest that mentalization plays a crucial role in enhancing interpersonal relationships, while having a secure attachment style also contributes to an increase in mentalization and interpersonal relationships. On the other hand,

individuals with an avoidant attachment style tend to experience a decrease in interpersonal relationships, which aligns with previous research (Kumpasoğlu et al., 2025; Parada-Fernández et al., 2021; Rasooli, 2022). Previous research has shown that ineffective mentalization is correlated to difficulties in emotion regulation and interpersonal issues (Kumpasoğlu et al., 2025). Additionally, another study found that having a secure attachment style can enhance the capacity for mentalization and may be an effective intervention for individuals struggling with emotional problems stemming from an insecure attachment style (Parada-Fernández et al., 2021). Furthermore, the study results revealed that adults facing challenges in interpersonal relationships are more likely to have an avoidant attachment style and less likely to have a secure attachment style (Rasooli, 2022).

In interpreting the findings of this study, the impact of mentalizing and attachment styles on interpersonal relationships is presented as a complex psychological dynamic. The findings align with many similar results, particularly regarding the positive influence of secure attachment style on interpersonal relationships and the facilitation of mentalizing (Bosmans et al., 2020). Mentalization, defined as an individual's capacity to comprehend and decipher their own and others' mental states, is a crucial skill for establishing positive and effective interpersonal relationships. This ability enables individuals to grasp the intentions, beliefs, and emotions of others, allowing them to adjust their actions accordingly. People with higher levels of mentalization are more adept at communicating with others and experience more fulfilling interpersonal exchanges (Borroni et al., 2024). A secure attachment style, which stems from a stable and predictable caregiving relationship during childhood, also plays a vital role in

fostering mentalization. Individuals with a secure attachment style tend to feel more secure in their relationships and display greater emotional flexibility with others. These skills are developed through mentalization, enabling individuals to form relationships founded on empathy and mutual respect. Thus, a secure attachment style not only promotes mentalization but also directly enhances the quality of interpersonal relationships (Bosmans et al., 2020). Conversely, an avoidant attachment style, often resulting from inadequate or rejecting caregiving during childhood, negatively impacts mentalization and consequently, interpersonal relationships. Individuals with this attachment style typically avoid developing close and intimate connections, struggle with expressing their emotions, and have difficulty embracing vulnerability with others. This aversion to emotional engagement can lead to a decline in the quality of interpersonal relationships, as these individuals may exhibit aloof and distant behavior rather than genuine and open interactions (Long et al., 2020).

The study discovered that rejection sensitivity and trauma could result in a decrease in both interpersonal relationships and mentalization, ultimately impacting relationships. This is consistent with findings from earlier studies (Ha et al., 2013; Hughesdon et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021; Ramadas et al., 2024). One research study indicated that rejection sensitivity not only has a direct effect on personal relationships but also has an indirect impact through negative ways of coping (Hou & Li, 2021). Another study indicated that issues with emotional regulation and mentalization can impact rejection sensitivity by weakening regulation in situations of rejection and causing bias in interpreting mental states (Ramadas et al., 2024). Moreover, research has shown that exposure to trauma is often correlated to increased symptoms and the likelihood of mental disorders (Liu et al., 2021). Additionally, a study revealed that interpersonal problems play a crucial role in the connection between exposure to interpersonal trauma and symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (Hughesdon et al., 2021).

Explaining this discovery entails noting that rejection sensitivity and trauma can diminish the quality of interpersonal relationships, both directly and indirectly, by hindering the ability to mentalize. This ability is indispensable in understanding and interpreting the thoughts and feelings of oneself and others. Fostering significant emotional connections and maintaining healthy relationships relies on this capability, and any interference with it can negatively impact interpersonal relationships (Mishra & Allen, 2023). Individuals with a history of trauma may struggle to trust others or perceive their positive intentions due to past painful experiences, leading to a reduced willingness to delve into the emotions and intentions of others and a decline in effective communication skills. Conversely, rejection sensitivity often causes an excessive focus on signs of rejection or neglect, which can impede mentalization as the individual expends mental energy on self-protection from rejection instead of deepening their understanding of relationships (Hardy et al., 2024; Mishra & Allen, 2023). This reduced ability to mentalize subsequently impacts interpersonal relationships negatively, as mentalization is crucial for fostering empathy, mutual understanding, and healthy emotional bonds. Impaired mentalization can result in difficulties in forming meaningful and intimate connections with others (Borroni et al., 2024). Moreover, rejection sensitivity and trauma can trigger avoidant behaviors, exaggerated reactions, or unhealthy communication patterns, further reducing the quality of interpersonal relationships. In essence, mentalization is not only directly influenced but also serves as a mediating factor, the decline of which worsens the negative impacts of rejection sensitivity and trauma on interpersonal relationships (Sahi & Eisenberger, 2021).

In the current study, several limitations were identified that could impact the interpretation of the findings. One limitation was the reliance on self-report measures, which could introduce bias and affect the validity of the data. To improve accuracy in future studies, it is recommended to incorporate a wider range of methods, such as direct observation and structured interviews. Additionally, future research should consider a more diverse sample that includes variations in socioeconomic factors and other demographic variables to understand the broader applicability of the results better. Another limitation was the potential influence of environmental stressors on the results, which were not fully controlled. Future studies must monitor such external factors to minimize their impact. The sensitivity of the trauma-related topic and participants' reluctance to share personal experiences could also have affected data quality. To address this, indirect data collection

methods, such as anonymous surveys or interviews, along with creating a more supportive and comfortable environment for participants, could help mitigate this issue. Furthermore, the presence of the researcher may have influenced participant behavior, potentially leading to social desirability bias. To reduce this effect, future studies should consider anonymizing data and minimizing direct interaction between the researcher and participants. Overall, while the study provides valuable insights, acknowledging these limitations and addressing them in future research would help strengthen the validity and generalizability of the findings.

The results of this study highlight the importance of mentalization and secure attachment styles in fostering healthy interpersonal relationships. In contrast, avoidant attachment styles hinder these relationships. The findings offer valuable guidance for counselors and therapists, suggesting the integration of mentalization training and secure attachment strategies into interventions. Tailored approaches for individuals with avoidant attachment or high rejection sensitivity should focus on helping them recognize and manage these challenges, as they directly affect relationship quality. Additionally, trauma-related issues must be addressed in therapy to minimize their impact on relationships. Mental health professionals can apply these insights to develop targeted interventions, including cognitive-behavioral techniques to enhance emotional awareness and communication skills. Schools and workplaces should consider incorporating mentalization training into their programs to improve interpersonal dynamics. Overall, the study underscores the role of mentalization and secure attachment in improving interpersonal relationships, with recommendations for fostering secure attachment and addressing trauma and rejection sensitivity to enhance communication and emotional well-being**.**

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## Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

## Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Ethical considerations in this study were that participation was entirely optional.

## Transparency of Data

By the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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## Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contribute to this study.

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