ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Journal of Emergency Health Care. 2026;15(1): 10
https://doi.org/10.22034/jehc.15.1.10

The Role of Attachment Styles in Predicting the Intention to Marry in Healthcare Workers Working in Stressful Wards

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Article history:

Received: 7 Mar 2026
Accepted: 14 May 2026
Available online: 25 Jun 2026

Keywords:

Attachment styles
Desire to marriage
Medical staff
Stressful wards

Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the present study is to investigate the role of attachment styles in predicting the intention to marry in healthcare workers working in stressful wards.
Method: The statistical population of the study consisted of single medical staff working in stressful wards in Tehran, from which a sample of 186 people was selected using simple random sampling method. Data collection tools included Collins and Reed's Adult Attachment Questionnaire and a researcher-made questionnaire based on Robitschek's (1998) Action Scale for Personal Growth. Multivariate regression statistical method was used to analyze the data.
Findings: The results of the study indicate that there was a relationship between attachment styles and the desire to marry ($p < 0.001$). Thus, with increasing scores of secure attachment style and ambivalent attachment style, the desire to marry increased.
Conclusion: In stressful work environments, differences in attachment styles can be a significant predictor of attitudes and inclination towards marriage, and paying attention to these variables in mental health promotion programs for healthcare workers can help improve the quality of interpersonal relationships and their emotional decision-making.

Cite this article as: Dorvasshi A, Taheri Manesh N. The Role of Attachment Styles in Predicting the Intention to Marry in Healthcare Workers Working in Stressful Wards. J Emerg Health Care. 2026;15(1):10. https://doi.org/10.22034/jehc.15.1.10.

Introduction

Marriage, as one of the most important social institutions, plays a fundamental role in the continuation of the generation, mental health, social development, and the formation of cultural structures. In fact, marriage is not only a personal and emotional phenomenon, but also a social and psychological phenomenon that is influenced by numerous factors (1). The desire to marry is considered one of the important indicators in examining individuals' attitudes towards this institution, because it reflects an individual's internal tendency to form a life together, commitment, intimacy, and acceptance of marital responsibilities (2). Nowadays, due to social, economic and cultural changes, people's attitudes and inclinations towards marriage have changed. Especially among groups working in stressful environments such as healthcare workers, factors such as job stress, emotional exhaustion, anxiety and psychological pressures can affect people's attitudes towards marriage (3). Therefore, identifying the psychological factors underlying the desire or reluctance to marry in this group is of particular importance.

One of the important psychological variables that can play a role in explaining the desire to marry is attachment style. The concept of attachment was first introduced by John Bowlby and refers to the deep and enduring emotional bond that forms between a child and his or her primary caregiver in the first years of life. This early relationship creates a mental model of self

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and others in the individual's mind, known as an "internal working pattern" and continues throughout life in interpersonal relationships into adulthood (4). Mary Ainsworth, by expanding the theory of attachment, proposed three major attachment styles: secure, avoidant, and ambivalent (or anxious-resistant). Each of these styles reflects the way an individual interacts with others, the level of trust in the relationship, the way they express emotions, and the way they deal with intimacy and commitment, which can affect an individual's tendency to marry (5).

People with a secure attachment style generally feel a sense of trust, intimacy, and stability in their relationships. They are able to rely on others while maintaining their independence. This group usually has a positive attitude toward marriage and sees marriage as a source of emotional security and personal growth (6). In contrast, people with an avoidant attachment style tend to avoid emotional closeness, value independence excessively, and have difficulty forming or maintaining intimate relationships. These characteristics can reduce their desire to marry because they perceive marriage as a threat to their personal freedom and independence (7). On the other hand, people with an ambivalent attachment style experience anxiety and emotional instability in their relationships. They need constant validation and excessive closeness from their partner and are afraid of being rejected or left alone. These characteristics can increase the desire to marry in these individuals, because they see marriage as an opportunity to reduce loneliness anxiety and achieve emotional support (8).

In stressful work environments such as hospitals and medical centers, employees are constantly exposed to psychological stress resulting from exposure to illness, death, heavy responsibilities, and long working hours. These stresses not only affect their mental health and job satisfaction, but can also change their attitudes toward romantic relationships and marriage (9). In such circumstances, attachment style, as one of the fundamental personality factors, can play a determining role in how an individual deals with stress, regulates emotions, and tends to form close relationships (10). Accordingly, the present study aims to investigate the role of attachment styles in predicting the desire to marry among healthcare workers working in stressful wards.

Rezapour Mirsaleh et al. (2025) investigated the relationship between attachment styles and attitudes towards marriage with regard to the mediating role of cognitive emotion regulation. The results showed that secure attachment style has a positive relationship with realistic attitudes towards marriage, and avoidant and ambivalent attachment styles have a negative and significant relationship with realistic attitudes towards marriage. A significant positive relationship was observed between the adaptive strategy in emotion regulation and realistic attitude towards marriage. Also, the non-adaptive strategy had a significant negative relationship with realistic attitude towards marriage and a significant positive relationship with pessimistic attitude towards marriage. The findings also showed that cognitive emotion regulation plays a mediating role in the relationship between attachment styles and attitudes towards marriage. In general, it can be said that people with a secure attachment style can regulate their emotions properly (11).

Diani-Dardashti et al. (2023) presented a study titled "The Mediating Role of Marriage Horizon Components in the Relationship Between Attachment Styles and Attitudes Towards Marriage." The results showed that secure attachment style has a significant relationship with the importance of marriage, readiness for marriage, and timing of marriage, and avoidant and insecure attachment styles have a significant relationship with girls' attitudes toward marriage. The formation of a secure attachment style, along with a cognitive process based on being ready for marriage, is effective in creating a positive attitude towards marriage in girls, and similarly, unhealthy attachment patterns have a negative impact on the cognitive processes affecting marriage and attitudes towards it (12).

In their study, Ekhlasi et al. (2022) compared the causes of singleness and delayed marriage among female and male students, with an emphasis on attachment styles. The results showed that legal factors were significantly among the factors delaying marriage among female students and cultural factors among male students. The results also showed that the type of attachment styles of individuals explains 1.5% of the variance in the desire to marry. In general, the results of the present study indicate that people with a secure attachment style are more willing to marry. Therefore, efforts to provide preventive education to parents to create a secure attachment style in their children and provide solutions to improve the attachment style of young people, along with policy-making by officials in this field to remove legal and cultural obstacles to young people's marriage, will be effective in increasing the desire to marry and reducing the age of marriage (13).

Park and Harris (2023) conducted a study aimed at examining the effect of attachment styles on attitudes toward marriage and the mediating role of emotional intimacy. Differences in perceptions of emotional intimacy among participants with secure, avoidant, and anxious/ambivalent attachment were examined to analyze the mediating effect of emotional intimacy between attachment styles and marital attitudes. Research findings showed that secure,

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anxious/ambivalent, and avoidant individuals tend to have different attitudes toward marriage. Their marital attitudes are moderated by the levels of emotional intimacy associated with their attachment styles (14).

The Method of Research

The present study is applied and its design is descriptive and correlational. The statistical population of the study includes single medical staff working in stressful wards in Tehran, who were identified as 360 people. This group includes nurses working in stressful departments such as the emergency department, intensive care, operating room, burn unit, and cancer ward. The sample size was 186 according to the Kerjcie & Morgan (1970) table. Taking into account possible dropout, the sample size was increased to 200. Finally, by deducting incomplete questionnaires, the statistical sample size was reduced to 189. In this study, simple random sampling method was used. The following questionnaires were used in this study:

- Collins and Reid Attachment Style Questionnaire (1990): This questionnaire includes self-assessment of relationship-building skills and self-description of the way of forming close attachments and consists of 18 items that are measured by marking on a 5-point Likert-type scale for each item (ranging from 1 = not at all characteristic of me to 5 = completely characteristic of me). Factor analysis identifies 3 subscales of 6 items. Collins and Reed developed their questionnaire based on the descriptions of the three main attachment styles (ambivalent insecure attachment, secure attachment style, and avoidant attachment style) in Hazen and Shaver's Adult Attachment Questionnaire (11). In order to examine the reliability of the attachment style questionnaire in the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated for each of the subscales. The results indicate an alpha coefficient of (0.62) for secure attachment style, (0.53) for avoidant attachment style, and (0.73) for ambivalent attachment style.
- Researcher-made questionnaire to measure the desire to marry based on the Action for Personal development Scale: This scale was developed by Robitschek (1998) to assess the degree to which individuals are willing to engage in activities that lead to change, growth, and advancement as a human being. This scale is a 9-item self-report instrument, and subjects must indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each of the statements on a 6-point Likert scale from strongly agree = 6 to strongly disagree = 1. To obtain a score for this scale, you must add the scores for all 9 items together. The range of scores for the Individual Growth Scale is between 1 and 54. High scores on this scale indicate the subjects' desire for personal growth and taking steps to achieve this goal, and low scores indicate the subjects' lack of desire for personal growth. Robitschek (1998) has found the internal consistency of this test to be between 0.78 and 0.88 in various studies. The test-retest reliability of this scale has also been reported to be between 0.73 and 0.84 over different periods of time. This test has been standardized in Iran by Joshan Lu and Ghaedi (2007). Also, the internal consistency of this scale was 0.87, which indicates the desirable reliability of this scale (15). In this study, the reliability coefficient of this scale was 0.79 using Cronbach's alpha.

Descriptive and inferential statistical methods were used to analyze the data. Statistical calculations were performed using SPSS statistical software.

Results

The description of the research data is presented as follows:

Table 1. Descriptive indices of attachment style scores

Statistical index / Attachment style	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
Secure style	325	24.10	3.97
Avoidant style	325	15.29	3.97
Ambilateral style	325	18.24	5.88

The results show that the highest average is related to the secure attachment style and the lowest average is related to the avoidant attachment style.

Research hypothesis: There is a relationship between attachment styles and the desire to marry in healthcare workers working in stressful wards.

In order to investigate this hypothesis, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated between attachment style scores and marriage intentions of healthcare workers working in stressful wards, and then a significance test of the correlation coefficients was performed.

The results show that the correlation coefficients calculated between the scores of secure attachment style and total marriage intention (0.181), avoidant attachment style and total mental health (-0.235), and ambivalent attachment style and total marriage intention (0.348) are significant at a level less than 0.001. In general, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between secure, avoidant, and ambivalent attachment styles and the desire to marry among healthcare workers working in stressful wards. It is noteworthy that the relationship between secure and ambivalent attachment styles with the desire to marry is positive, and the relationship between avoidant attachment style and the desire to marry is negative.

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Given that an increase in the score on the desire to marry scale indicates a high desire to marry; Therefore, with increasing scores of secure and ambivalent attachment styles, the desire to marry among healthcare workers working in stressful wards increases, and with increasing scores of avoidant attachment style, the desire to marry among healthcare workers working in stressful wards decreases. The calculated coefficients of determination indicate that in general, the ambivalent style (12.11), the avoidant style (5.52), and the secure style (3.28) explain the percentage of changes in the willingness to marry of medical staff working in stressful wards, respectively.

Table 2. Results of correlation coefficients for the relationship between attachment styles and desire to marry

Statistical index	Number	Correlation coefficient	Significance level	Coefficient of determination
Secure - Marriage intention	325	0.181	0.001	3.28
Avoidant - Marriage intention	325	-.0235	0.001	5.52
Ambivalent - Marriage intention	325	-0.348	0.001	12.11

Discussion

The aim of the present study is to investigate the role of attachment styles in predicting the desire to marry in healthcare workers working in stressful wards. The calculated correlation coefficients show that the scores of secure attachment style and total desire to marry (0.181), avoidant attachment style and total desire to marry (-0.235), and ambivalent attachment style and total desire to marry (0.348) are significant at a level less than 0.001. In general, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between secure, avoidant, and ambivalent attachment styles and the desire to marry among healthcare workers working in stressful wards. It is noteworthy that the relationship between secure and ambivalent attachment styles and the desire to marry is positive, and the relationship between avoidant attachment style and the desire to marry is negative. Given that an increase in the score on the desire to marry scale indicates a high desire to marry, therefore, with an increase in the scores of secure and ambivalent attachment styles, the employees' desire to marry increases, and with an increase in the scores of avoidant attachment style, their desire to marry decreases. The calculated coefficients of determination indicate that in general, the ambivalent style (12.11), the avoidant style (5.52), and the secure style (3.28) explain the percentage of changes in the willingness to marry of medical staff working in stressful wards, respectively.

Conclusion

The findings of the present study indicate that attachment styles play an important role in shaping attitudes and desire for marriage among healthcare workers working in stressful wards. The results of the correlations indicate that secure attachment style has a positive relationship with the desire to marry; meaning that people who have higher emotional security, mutual trust, and ability to regulate emotions have a more positive attitude towards marriage and consider marriage a source of psychological support and emotional stability. On the other hand, avoidant attachment style showed a negative relationship with the desire to marry, which indicates that people who tend to be emotionally distant, overly self-reliant, and afraid of intimacy consider marriage as a limitation or threat to their personal independence. In line with the research of Park and Harris (14), ambivalent attachment style has also shown a positive relationship with the desire to marry; although this desire may be due to a strong need for belonging and fear of loneliness rather than healthy and developmental motivations for forming a marital relationship.

Coefficient of determination analysis also indicates that the ambivalent attachment style has the highest rate of explaining changes in the desire to marry, followed by the avoidant style and finally the secure style. This finding may reflect the specific working conditions of healthcare workers in stressful environments, where psychological and emotional pressures may intensify the need for communication and emotional support in bipolar individuals. In contrast, employees with an avoidant style may emphasize self-reliance and emotional distancing in such environments and, as a result, show less desire to marry. Therefore, it can be concluded that in stressful work environments, differences in attachment styles can be a significant predictor of attitudes and inclination towards marriage, and paying attention to these variables in mental health promotion programs for healthcare workers can help improve the quality of interpersonal relationships and their emotional decision-making.

Given that the research was conducted on healthcare workers working in high-stress wards in Tehran, caution is needed in generalizing the results to other

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statistical populations. Therefore, conducting similar research will enable the generalization of the research findings.

Acknowledgment:

None

Funding:

None

Authors Contributions:

The author contributed to the data analysis. Drafting, revising and approving the article, responsible for all aspects of this work.

Ethical Consideration:

The research data and literature have not been copied from any worksauthor upon reasonable request.

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