

## Types of attachment as predictors of emotional dependence in couples



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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between attachment styles and emotional dependence in adulthood. Attachment formed in childhood often continues into adulthood, influencing the quality of adult relationships, especially romantic ones. Insecure attachment between children and parents is linked to negative outcomes in adult relationships, such as poor relationship quality and infidelity. Recent societal changes have added new pressures on individuals and their relationships. Emotional dependence has emerged as a disorder rooted in emotional reliance, emphasizing the need to explore the underlying factors of dependent relationships. The study included 1,383 participants aged 25 to 60 from Quito, Ecuador, who completed online questionnaires on relationship styles and emotional dependency. Differences in gender and age were found in both areas, confirming some findings from earlier studies. Additionally, two independent predictive models were identified: preoccupied attachment explained 25% of the emotional dependence, and fearful attachment explained 14%. These results suggest that individuals with low self-confidence and feelings of unworthiness are more likely to develop emotional dependence. These new insights make an important contribution to the field. The study also suggests intervention areas for clinical and real-life settings to improve well-being based on these findings.

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### 1. Introduction

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) states that human beings—born helpless and underdeveloped—have an innate and crucial need to establish emotional bonds with significant figures who can provide them with adequate care and security until they reach maturity. A continuous exchange of signals and responses thus takes place between the infant and their caregivers, gradually establishing a pattern of specific interactions (Ainsworth et al., 2015) known as the ‘attachment behavioral system’ (Bowlby, 1969; Cassidy, 2016), whose core elements are universal and independent of specific cultural niches (Mesman et al., 2016).

The baby expresses its needs primarily through crying, which serves as a mechanism to manifest internal anxiety due to any type of discomfort. The response of the caregiver alleviates the child’s anxiety and signals to the child that individuals who

can help regulate their distress exist in the external world (Lyons-Ruth and Jacobvitz, 2016). However, the nature of the caregiver’s response to the child’s needs depends on their degree of availability and accessibility: that is, their sensitivity to the signals and implicit communications in the child’s behavior (Ainsworth et al., 2015). The quality of the repeated interactions between the caregiver figure and the child generates the child’s ‘internal working models,’ which are mental representations of attachment (Bowlby, 1969; Bretherton and Munholland, 2016; Cassidy, 2016). These experiences accumulate, giving rise to the baby’s developing internal representations of themselves (model of self) and of the people around them (model of other). These representations are based on the level of internal anxiety present or absent in the child, as well as on the level of avoidance and or approach they exhibit with their caregivers (Bowlby, 1969; Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991; Bretherton, 1999; Bretherton and Munholland, 2016; Valle and Moral, 2018).

The model of self and the model of others are the two dimensions that underlie attachment behavior, and they determine the development of a specific type of attachment in the child (Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991). When the interaction is adequate, the infant exhibits low levels of anxiety and

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avoidance, which promotes a healthy approach towards the figures that provide attention. In this type of attachment, both models, self and other, are considered appropriate, leading to the development of secure attachment characterized by trust in oneself and others and also by a balance between personal autonomy and intimacy with others (Bowlby, 1969; Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991; Ainsworth et al., 2015).

According to the proposal Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) put forth, however, the three types of insecure attachment reveal an inadequate early relational process associated with the models of self and other. With dismissive avoidant attachment, a positive model of the self is presented due to low anxiety. However, the model of others is negative, as interactions with the caregiver are characterized by rigidity and coldness, causing the child to develop avoidance behavior towards their caregiver figures (Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991; Ainsworth et al., 2015). With anxious, preoccupied attachment, interactions with the caregiver are ambivalent. Such interactions lead to an inadequate model of self that is characterized by high internal anxiety. Simultaneously, contact and approval from others are avidly sought, often with poor results, giving rise to dependence behaviors (Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991). Finally, with fearful avoidant attachment, interactions are highly dysfunctional. High levels of anxiety and avoidance are present, and these cause both the perception of oneself and others to be altered. In this type of attachment, the child develops a negative model of both self and others: the model is characterized by low self-esteem, frustrated attachment needs, and avoidance of proximity to others (Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991; Ainsworth et al., 2015).

The type of attachment formed in childhood tends to persist into adulthood. It influences the quality of the relationships established both with others and at the individual level (Köber et al., 2019). Since the effects of secure or insecure attachment are evident in the mental health and psychological well-being of individuals throughout their lives (Shaver et al., 2016), several studies that have followed subjects from childhood to adulthood have been conducted. Some researchers have linked attachment style to emotional regulation (Henschel et al., 2020; Mikulincer and Shaver, 2019), exacerbated discomfort in stressful situations, and ease of triggering sad memories that lead to the intensification of negative emotions and cognitive blockage (Guzmán-González et al., 2016; Girmé et al., 2021), anxiety disorders, depression (Frost et al., 2024), somatization, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), borderline disorder, and substance abuse. Moreover, attachment has been linked to well-being in romantic relationships (Feeney, 2016; Brandão et al., 2020) and has been associated with various problems for couples, such as poor relationship quality (Givertz et al., 2013) and infidelity (Warach and Josephs, 2019), among other issues. Primarily due to technological advancements, interpersonal

relationships, particularly those between romantic partners, have undergone significant transformations in recent years. These transformations have placed a series of pressures on individuals, the structures of their relationships, and the dynamics within those relationships (Hohenstein et al., 2023). In this context, faced with crises and difficulties in coping, emotional dependence emerges as a disorder rooted in affective dependence (Sirvent and Moral, 2018), which is understood to be a dysfunctional pattern characterized by maladaptive and chronic behaviors. These behaviors include the pursuit of unfulfilled emotional needs through others (Sirvent and Moral, 2018), feelings of subordination and asymmetry, excessive need for attention, and avoidance of events considered threatening, such as arguments or relationship dissolution.

The concept of emotional dependence has gained significant attention in psychology research in recent decades (Sirvent and Moral, 2018; Camarillo et al., 2020; Castillo-González et al., 2024; Etxaburu et al., 2024). However, it must be differentiated from other closely related concepts such as codependency and bidependence. Codependency refers to the relational dependence of a person who is not addicted to substances but maintains a pattern of behaviors, cognitions, and attitudes towards an addicted individual with whom they share a pathological relationship pattern. Bidependence, on the other hand, is a relational pathology associated with addiction, where an addicted individual (addicted mainly to alcohol or drugs) is dependent on another individual, who may or may not be addicted themselves.

Emotional dependence is also known as sentimental or affective dependence. It refers to the “extreme need of an emotional nature that a person feels towards their partner throughout their different relationships” (Castelló, 2005; Etxaburu et al., 2024). This script in couple relationships is constituted of needs unmet since childhood that the individual seeks to resolve through close interpersonal relationships; cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioral components are included (Camarillo et al., 2020).

Emotional dependence has been identified as a potential public health problem with important socio-health implications (Sirvent and Moral, 2018). The prevalence of this problem varies across studies, with estimates ranging from 11% to 23.3% (Valle and Moral, 2018). Some authors assert that emotional dependence seems to be related to various psychosocial and mental health problems, such as intimate partner violence (Castillo-González et al., 2024), anxiety and depressive disorders, substance use, suicidal ideation, emotional regulation (Etxaburu et al., 2024), among other relevant aspects.

Several factors are cited as potential causes for the development of patterns of emotional dependence in individuals. These encompass emotional deficiencies and unsatisfactory early

relationships (Castelló, 2005; Lemos and Londoño, 2006; Etxaburu et al., 2024), the pathological maintenance of bonds with significant childhood figures, reliance on external sources for self-esteem (Etxaburu et al., 2024), and overprotection from the parents. Biological, sociocultural, and gender-related factors may also influence the development of emotional dependence (Castelló, 2005). As evidence, many of these triggers derive from individuals' experiences and their early bonding relationships with primary caregivers, prompting further exploration of the relationship that emotional dependence has with attachment theory.

The correlation between attachment bonds formed in childhood and the interpersonal relationships individuals establish in adulthood has been empirically demonstrated, including their relational strategies and ways of bonding (Díaz-Mosquera et al., 2024; Neumann and Rohmann, 2024). However, some researchers maintain that adult attachment, influenced by parental styles experienced in childhood, may significantly influence the development of emotional dependence patterns within romantic relationships (Nunes et al., 2021) and the perpetuation of abusive dynamics (Valle and Moral, 2018). Individuals entrenched in relationships marked by emotional dependence could have developed an insecure attachment style, such as anxiety or worry, during their childhood. This pattern could continue into adulthood, especially among those suffering abuse in their relationships. The study of the relation between attachment bonds developed in childhood and the quality of relationships in adulthood constitutes a prospective line of research, given that the implications of this topic in the psychopathology of love and romantic relationships are a phenomenon that is not easily detected and can often be confused,

due to its comorbidity, with anxiety or depression. Additionally, research indicates that there is still much to explore on this subject, especially in Latin American contexts, due to the sociocultural constructions that mediate relationships between men and women. Under these considerations, the aim of the present study was to explore the relation between attachment types and emotional dependence in young and mature adults in Ecuador, a topic that is particularly important and novel, given the significant implications that attachment bonds have on the quality of interpersonal relationships.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

This exploratory study was conducted with participants selected using non-probability and convenience sampling among residents of the city of Quito. The inclusion criteria comprised: a) voluntary participation, b) age older than 25 years, c) involvement in a relationship or with previous relationship experience, and d) a signed informed consent form for data usage. The questionnaire was administered in the period from June 2022 to December 2022.

The final sample consisted of 1,383 participants, 64.3% of whom identified as female and 35.7% of whom identified as male. Regarding age distribution, 62.8% were between 25 and 40 years old, and 37.2% were between 41 and 60 years old ( $M = 36.75$ ;  $SD = 8.51$ ). On average, the participants reported having had 4.1 partners ( $SD = 3.73$ ) throughout their life. Table 1 summarizes the sociodemographic data related to the marital status, educational level, and sexual orientation of the participants.

**Table 1:** Sociodemographic data of the participants (n = 1,383)

		Total			
		Women	Men	n	%
Civil status	Married	350	181	531	38.4
	Cohabiting	81	43	124	9
	Divorced and in a new relationship	49	20	69	5
	Divorced and not in a relationship	48	15	63	4.6
	Separated and in a new relationship	3	5	8	0.6
	Separated and not in a relationship	27	8	35	2.5
	Single and currently in a relationship	153	102	255	18.4
	Single and not in a relationship	169	117	286	20.7
	Widower and in a new relationship	3	0	3	0.2
	Widowed and not in a relationship	6	3	9	0.7
Educational level	Primary	11	2	13	0.9
	Secondary	117	89	206	14.9
	Technology	112	86	198	14.4
	University undergraduate	424	209	633	45.7
	Master's degree	197	93	290	21
	Doctorate	28	15	43	3.1
Sexual orientation	Heterosexual	840	472	1312	94.9
	Bisexual	35	7	42	3
	Homosexual	13	13	26	1.9
	Other	1	2	3	0.3

### 2.2. Instruments

In the present study, two instruments were used: the Relationship Styles Questionnaire (RSQ) by Griffin and Bartholomew (1994) and the Emotional

Dependency Questionnaire developed by Lemos and Londoño (2006). A description of these instruments follows below.

The Relationship Styles Questionnaire (Griffin and Bartholomew, 1994) is a self-report instrument

designed to evaluate adult attachment styles (secure, fearful, preoccupied, and dismissive) and their associated dimensions (anxiety and avoidance). The instrument consists of 30 short, scored phrases rated on a Likert-type scale from 1 (not at all like me) to 5 (very much like me). According to [Bartholomew and Horowitz \(1991\)](#), the reliability of the Relationship Styles Questionnaire ranges between 0.87 and 0.95. Recently, [Pietrzak and Ciecuch \(2024\)](#) reported ranges of reliability between 0.77 and 0.85. In the present study, the Relationship Styles Questionnaire showed a consistency level of 0.897.

The Emotional Dependency Questionnaire ([Lemos and Londoño, 2006](#)) is also a self-report instrument. The questionnaire consists of 23 items distributed across 6 dimensions, evaluated through short sentences, and rated on a 6-level Likert scale. The first dimension, separation anxiety, evaluates the fear of a possible breakup or distancing, whether real or imagined. The second dimension, affective expression in the couple, assesses the individual's need for expression of affection to reduce their feelings of insecurity. The third dimension, plan modification, investigates the change in activities or plans made by the individual to satisfy their partner or spend more time with them. Fear of loneliness, the fourth dimension, evaluates the fear of not having a partner or feeling unloved. The fifth dimension, borderline expression, investigates impulsive actions or expressions performed to reestablish the relationship when faced with the possibility of abandonment. Finally, the sixth dimension, attention seeking, involves actively seeking attention to become the center of the couple's life. The total scale demonstrates strong reliability, with an alpha coefficient of 0.95. The internal consistency coefficients of the dimensions, or subscales, are also high, ranging between 0.809 and 0.903 ([Lemos and Londoño, 2006](#)). This instrument is widely utilized in research on the topic of emotional dependence ([Etxaburu et al., 2024](#)). In the present study, the total Emotional Dependency Questionnaire scale presented with an internal consistency of 0.953.

### 2.3. Procedure

The researchers uploaded the questionnaires to a Google Drive form, which was distributed via email to various contacts; the questionnaires were also shared on digital platforms and social networks. In the first part of the form, participants were provided with information about the research objectives and scope, as well as their rights. Prior to commencing the questionnaire, participants were asked to sign the informed consent form. The researchers conducted all procedures in accordance with the approved guidelines of the Ethics Committee for Research with Human Subjects of the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador. Once the data was collected, it was purified, and forms with incomplete information were discarded. The data were analyzed using the IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows version

28 ([IBM, 2021](#)). The analyses performed included descriptive statistics, comparisons of means with Student's t-test, Cohen's d, correlations, and multiple linear regression, as appropriate.

## 3. Results and discussion

### 3.1. Attachment

For secure attachment, the only differences identified were related to gender, with men exhibiting a significantly higher mean than women, accompanied by a moderate effect size, according to [Table 2](#). Another Latin American study ([Pérez-Aranda et al., 2019](#)) that involved participants aged between 25 and 60 years, an age range similar to the one in the current study, reported similar findings. These results, however, differ from other previous studies carried out in Ecuador, in which the female gender was favored in terms of secure attachment ([Merlyn and Díaz-Mosquera, 2021](#)). Further research should be conducted to address these differences.

As shown in [Table 2](#), significant differences were found between age groups: the mean for secure attachment is higher in the population aged 41 to 60 years than in that aged 25 to 40 years, indicating a high prevalence of secure attachment among older individuals, with a moderate effect size. The 41-to-60-year age group also showed a low prevalence of two of the types of insecure attachment, dismissive and fearful, with a high effect size. The means remain consistent across both age groups only with preoccupied attachment. In terms of age groups, the present results are like those detected in Ecuadorian population by [Merlyn and Díaz-Mosquera \(2021\)](#), who found in their study that secure attachment rates rise with the age of participants. This is also consistent with research conducted in other cultural contexts, which found that attachment anxiety (present in fearful and preoccupied types) is higher among younger adults and lower among middle-aged and older adults ([Chopik et al., 2013](#)). This could suggest that, as individuals mature, their attachment styles may tend to progress towards security.

### 3.2. Emotional dependence

The results related to emotional dependence suggest significant differences related to gender in the subscales of plan modification, attention seeking, borderline expression, and the total for emotional dependence, as shown in [Table 3](#). Across all the subscales, men scored higher than women.

One of the first authors who defined emotional dependence, [Castelló \(2005\)](#), highlighted a predisposition of the female gender to developing emotional dependence, and this has also been found in recent studies ([Castillo-González et al., 2024](#)). In Latin American cultures, gender roles clearly influence this predisposition, as women are expected to be more sentimental and affectionate, while men



are encouraged to be emotionally detached. However, the findings of the present study contradict this predisposition, with differences in emotional dependence observed primarily among men, differences that were also found by other authors (Urbiola and Estévez, 2015; Estévez et al., 2018). Finally, some studies have not found gender differences in emotional dependence. This underscores the importance of continuing research in this area to elucidate the factors that explain these differences. Nevertheless, men in the sample exhibited a higher level of emotional dependence compared to women. When examining the subscales, it becomes evident that this dependence is specifically linked to three dimensions: plan modification, attention seeking, and affective expression. This indicates that within the population studied, men are more inclined to change their activities to please their partners, seek exclusive attention from them, and resort to impulsive actions to restore the relationship if they perceive a threat of abandonment. Moral-Jiménez and González-Sáez (2019) have found similar results in regard to plan modification and attention-seeking in boys. A possible explanation for these outcomes lies in internal factors, such as the type of attachment formed in childhood.

On the contrary, as shown in Table 4, there are no differences associated with age in either the

subscales or the total emotional dependence. In the study by Urbiola and Estévez (2015), the results were also inconclusive regarding the differences in emotional dependency scores based on age.

### 3.3. Relationship between attachment and emotional dependence

Emotional dependence presented moderate, positive, and significant correlations with two types of insecure attachment: preoccupied and fearful, according to Table 5. However, it showed a negative correlation with secure attachment. Furthermore, the types of attachment maintained correlations that were consistent with the proposal of the theory.

These findings corroborate those in previous research, both in similar (Díaz-Mosquera et al., 2024) and in different cultural contexts, in which evidence has been provided of the relationship between emotional dependence and adult attachment. Valle and Moral (2018) found a relationship between emotional dependence and the fearful attachment style (Valle and Moral, 2018) and Estévez et al. (2018) with the preoccupied style; similarly, other research established a relationship between insecure attachment variables and emotional dependence.

**Table 2: Type of attachment by gender and age**

Type of attachment	Women (n = 889)		Men (n = 494)		t	d	25 to 40 years old (n = 868)		41 to 60 years old (n = 515)		t	d
	M	SD	M	SD			M	SD	M	SD		
Secure	3.04	0.48	3.12	0.49	-2.761**	0.5	3.05	0.49	3.10	0.48	1.880*	0.5
Dismissing	3.46	0.91	3.43	0.90	0.515	-	3.54	0.89	3.30	0.90	4.736***	0.9
Preoccupied	2.63	0.73	2.66	0.77	0.684	-	2.64	0.76	2.64	0.72	0.240	-
Fearful	2.59	0.87	2.56	0.87	0.603	-	2.63	0.85	2.49	0.88	2.723*	0.9

t: t-test for independent samples; d: Cohen's d; \*: p < 0.05; \*\*\*: p < 0.000

**Table 3: Emotional dependence by gender**

	Women			Men			Chi-square	p
	Presence%	At risk %	Absence%	Presence%	At risk %	Absence%		
Separation anxiety	10.6	-	89.4	11.1	-	88.9	0.104	0.748
Couple effective expression	9.4	-	90.6	9.1	-	90.9	0.043	0.835
Plan modification	11.2	-	88.8	16.4	-	83.6	7.399	0.007*
Fear of loneliness	7.2	-	92.8	7.3	-	92.7	0.004	0.952
Attention seeking	7.0	-	93.0	14.2	-	85.8	19.045	0.000***
Borderline expression	8.1	-	91.9	14.8	-	85.2	15.090	0.000***
Total emotional dependence	9.4	13.3	77.3	11.7	18.4	69.8	9.548	0.008*

t: t-test for independent samples; \*: p < 0.05; \*\*\*: p < 0.000

**Table 4: Emotional dependence by age**

	25 to 40 years old			41 to 60 years old			Chi-square	p
	Presence%	At risk%	Absence%	Presence%	At risk%	Absence%		
Separation anxiety	11.2	-	88.8	10.1	-	89.9	0.391	0.532
Couple effective expression	10	-	90	8.2	-	91.8	1.333	0.248
Plan modification	13.2	-	86.8	12.8	-	87.2	0.053	0.817
Fear of loneliness	7.4	-	92.6	7	-	93	0.071	0.790
Attention seeking	10.4	-	89.6	8.2	-	91.8	1.834	0.176
Borderline expression	11.1	-	88.9	9.5	-	90.5	0.822	0.364
Total emotional dependence	10.8	16.4	72.8	9.3	13	77.7	4.139	0.126

t: t-test for independent samples

### 3.4. Linear regression analysis

Preoccupied and fearful attachments were demonstrated to be highly related to emotional

dependence; therefore, investigating the potential predictive relationship among these variables was considered important. To this end, two linear regression analyses were conducted, with each type

of attachment correlated with emotional dependence entered as an independent variable. Independent regressions were performed because, although the two types of attachment share certain characteristics between them, they differ in other aspects. The analysis involving preoccupied attachment

comprised 1,367 valid cases, and that of fearful attachment comprised 1,363, with 16 and 20 cases, respectively, being excluded due to the presence of atypical values that exceeded three standard deviations.

**Table 5:** Results of the correlation analysis between types of attachment and emotional dependence

Type of attachment	Secure	Dismissing	Preoccupied	Fearful	Emotional dependence
Secure	1	0.038	-0.054*	-0.135**	-0.121**
Dismissing		1	-0.073**	0.466**	0.012
Preoccupied			1	0.327**	0.469**
Fearful				1	0.342**

\*:  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*:  $p < 0.01$

Based on the results of the linear regression analyses, two prediction models were derived, as shown in Table 6. After verifying the Durbin–Watson independence assumption (preoccupied attachment,  $D-W = 2.014$ ; fearful attachment,  $D-W = 2.013$ ), both independent models clearly demonstrated statistical significance and a satisfactory fit. This was corroborated by the analysis of variance data ( $p < 0.001$ ) and the  $t$ -test scores, which indicated that both attachment styles were predictors of emotional dependence.

The empirical model for preoccupied attachment explained 25% of the variance changes in emotional dependence. The model coefficient values were  $\beta_0 = 10.848$  for the constant and  $\beta_1 = 14.688$  for preoccupied attachment.

The empirical model for fearful attachment explained 14% of the variance changes in emotional dependence. The model coefficient values were  $\beta_0 = 25.488$  for the constant and  $\beta_1 = 9.71$  for fearful attachment.

Other studies have been able to establish some interplay between attachment, emotional dependence, and other variables, such as substance abuse. The present research goes beyond that,

successfully establishing the existence of a strong link between preoccupied and fearful attachment styles and emotional dependence. Both types of attachment have in common the tendency of individuals to develop an inadequate model of self, thus perceiving themselves as unworthy. In the case of preoccupied attachment—the one most closely linked to emotional dependence—individuals also possess a positive model of others, resulting in a heightened need for attachment to, and approval from, external sources (Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991; Valle and Moral, 2018). This would explain why preoccupied attachment becomes a predictor of emotional dependence: a negative self-image coupled with a strong need for validation from others would be the basis for dependent behaviors developing within a relationship. Conversely, fearful attachment, while also characterized by an inadequate model of self, entails a negative perception of others, predisposing individuals to shun intimacy, fear rejection, and avoid interpersonal contact (Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991; Valle and Moral, 2018). This fear of forming connections could act as a deterrent, resulting in a weaker predictive relationship.

**Table 6:** Independent predictor models of emotional dependence

	Variables	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> <sub>Corrected</sub>	F	B	$\beta$	t	VIF
Predictor 1	Constant	0.249	0.248	451.079**	10.848		5.72***	
	Preoccupied attachment				14.668	0.499	21.24***	1.00
Predictor 2	Constant	0.139	0.139	219.929**	25.488		14.97***	
	Fearful attachment				9.271	0.373	14.83***	1.00

\*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; Durbin–Watson preoccupied attachment test, 2.012; R<sup>2</sup>: determination coefficient; R<sup>2</sup><sub>Corrected</sub>: adjusted coefficient of determination; F: analysis of variance; B: non-standardized beta;  $\beta$ : standardized beta; t:  $t$ -test; VIF: Variance inflation factor

#### 4. Conclusions

The present study revealed several interesting findings. Regarding attachment, secure attachment styles were identified more frequently in men than in women, and these styles are predominantly found in individuals aged 40 and above. In terms of emotional dependence, and in contrast to previous studies, a higher prevalence was observed in men than in women, manifesting primarily in behaviors related to changing plans, seeking attention, and resorting to impulsive actions to restore the bond when it feels threatened. However, the main contribution of this research lies in the relationship found between fearful and preoccupied attachment

styles and their predictive value for emotional dependence.

The findings of the present study have important implications for practical applications. The relationship found between fearful and preoccupied attachment styles and emotional dependence allows interventions focused on addressing the self-model, which is disturbed in both cases. For example, issues of self-confidence and self-efficacy can be addressed. Additionally, for individuals with fearful attachment types, emphasis would be placed on reducing anxiety and fostering trust in relationships. By addressing these issues, we would be working to prevent possible involvement in dependency relationships. Furthermore, given that the findings indicate a

greater emotional dependence in males and a prevalence of insecure attachment styles in young people, specific interventions could be implemented according to age and gender. In couples' therapy, these interventions could focus on behaviors such as plan modification, attention seeking, and borderline expression, which are the subscales of emotional dependence that are most affected. This proactive approach is crucial, especially considering the numerous research linking emotional dependence to relationship abuse and violence (De Los Reyes et al., 2022; Castillo-González et al., 2024) and the numerous studies that have indicated that attachment formed in childhood persists into adulthood, exerting notable influences on adult behaviors within relationships. These include well-being in romantic relationships (Feeney, 2016; Brandão et al., 2020), as well as couples' issues such as diminished relationship quality (Givertz et al., 2013) and infidelity (Warach and Josephs, 2019).

Secondly, these findings may be beneficial in other life circumstances. For example, if preoccupied and fearful attachment styles are detected early in childhood, preventive measures can be taken to keep individuals from falling into patterns of emotional dependency, for example, through psychoeducation about healthy relationships and teaching coping and communication skills. Family therapists can also use this information about attachment styles to improve relationships and family dynamics. Finally, these findings suggest applications in other real-life scenarios. In educational contexts, such as schools and universities, information about attachment styles and their impact on emotional dependency can be used to educate people about the importance of healthy attachments and how to recognize signs of emotional dependency.

Despite the significance of these findings, acknowledging the study's limitations is important. Firstly, the data was collected solely from participants in the city of Quito; therefore, due to cultural diversity, their applicability to contexts with different cultural characteristics, even within the same country, is limited. Secondly, the sample consisted mainly of individuals with a high level of education—that is, university attendees or those with a master's or doctorate degree—thus limiting the generalizability of the results. It is then necessary to explore other contextual settings within Ecuador or other Latin American countries in future research endeavors on the topic. This would introduce greater heterogeneity in data collection, ensuring greater representativeness across various aspects such as place of residence (urban or rural) and educational level of participants, among others. Other limitations of the study arise from the method employed in terms of sampling and instruments. The use of non-probability and convenience sampling limits the generalizability of the findings. Similarly, the reliance on self-report questionnaires may have introduced biases such as social desirability or recall bias. Therefore, it is recommended that these

methodological aspects be controlled to see if similar results are found.

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## Compliance with ethical standards

### Ethical considerations

All participants provided informed consent, and their confidentiality was protected. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee for Research with Human Subjects of the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador.

### Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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