Health Education and Health Promotion (HEHP) (2017) Vol. 5 (1)

An Enquiry into the Predictive Power of the Theory of Planned Behavior for Attachment Styles of Housewives

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Abstract

Aim: As one of the most important factors in interpersonal interactions, attachment style develops in childhood and continues in future according to the context where one grows. The aim of this study was to explore the predictive power of the theory of planned behavior (TPB) for attachment styles in housewives in Birjand, Iran.

Methods: This descriptive-analytical study was conducted on 200 housewives referring to health centers in Birjand in 2016. The participants were selected by the cluster sampling method, and were assessed using Collins and Read's Adult Attachment Style Questionnaire (RASS) and a researcher-made questionnaire with regard to the constructs of TPB. The data were analyzed in SPSS-19 using Pearson's correlation coefficient, stepwise regression, ANOVA, and ANCOVA tests. The significance level was set at P values less than 0.05.

Findings: A significant negative correlation between marriage duration and anxious attachment style (r=-0.145) and a significant positive correlation between marriage age and secure attachment style (r=0.180) was found. The avoidant attachment style was correlated positively with attitude and perceived behavioral control variables, and the anxious attachment style was associated negatively with attitude and perceived behavioral control variables. The attitude and subjective norms constructs predicted 6.7% of the avoidant attachment style, while attitude predicted 4.6% of the anxious attachment style.

Conclusion: TPB is a weak predictor of attachment styles. Thereby, indirect effective factors and contributors to attachment styles should be identified.

Keywords: Theory of planned behavior, Attachment style, Women

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Introduction

As one of the most important factors in interpersonal interactions, attachment style develops in childhood and continues in future according to the context where one grows [1]. Attachment is a reciprocal emotional bond that can provide a safe condition and predict the mental health of a person [2, 3].

Fogel states that attachment is an emotional bond between two individuals so that one of them strives to maintain closeness or proximity to the subject of attachment and acts so as the relationship is ensured to continue. Bowlby believes that these mutual emotional ties that lead to the proximity of mother and child are the first manifestations of attachment. Attachment maintains mutual closeness between two individuals at all stages of life. Attachment theory posits that the type of mother-child relationship in early years of life, accessibility of a child to his/her mother, a mother's support to the child in dangerous situations, the degree of maternal sensitivity, and the maternal dependability enabling the child to explore the environment all determine an individual's attachment style [4, 5].

Attachment is one of the most important developmental concepts in human development. For the first time, Bowlby raised this subject to explain the relationship between the child and the main caregivers. After him, Ainsworth introduced three general attachment styles: 1) Secure attachment style, 2) insecure avoidant attachment style and 3) insecure ambivalent attachment style. Later, Hazan and Shaver used the theory of attachment styles to justify and explain the social, romantic and sexual relationships during adolescence and adulthood. In their view, attachment styles reflect the subjective representation of oneself and others, and lead to different orientations in close relationships. Attachment styles are considered as persistent personal dimensions, which have a very important role in interpersonal communications not only in childhood but also in adulthood [6-8].

In the classical attachment theory, adults with secure attachment are people who have a positive sense of self and a positive perception of the others, and are socially more successful and have more self-confidence. Adults with avoidant attachment style consider themselves as self-sufficient and independent of others. They deny vulnerabilities and claim that they do not need close relationships, and hence, tend to avoid intimacy. On the other hand, adults with anxious/ambivalent attachment style tend less to have a positive attitude toward themselves. They often doubt their worth as a spouse and blame themselves for the lack of accountability on the part of their spouse. The results of these studies show that secure couples are more likely to provide care in interaction with their spouse, which is

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effective in dealing with dangerous situations and enjoying the sense of safety [9, 10].

Childhood attachments affect adulthood. Secure attachment of children directs and orients their emotional competence and qualities; this orientation of emotional competence is most visible in interpersonal relationships [11, 12].

It has been shown that subjects with a secure attachment style have higher marital satisfaction, lower interpersonal problems, and higher levels of happiness than those with avoidant and ambivalent attachment styles [4, 13-15].

One of the most effective models in health education and promotion that addresses the identification and evaluation of factors affecting human behavior is the theory of planned behavior (TPB). This theory considers an individual's intention to engage in a behavior as the main reason for a behavior. Intention is itself influenced by the attitude toward behavior, the subjective norms of the behavior, and the individual's control of the behavior (in terms of ease or difficulty). The most important determinant of a person's behavior is his/her behavioral intention. The individual's behavioral intention depends on his/her attitude to the behavior and the subjective norms associated with that behavior. In other words, the behavior of a person depends on his/her attitude toward a particular behavior and how other people view the behavior. The person's attitude and the views of other important community members are both factors that determine the individual's behavioral intention and whether or not a person performs a behavior. There is also a third factor, along with the two aforementioned factors, called "*perceived control*". Perceived control relates to the existence of conditions and facilities for adopting the desired behavior. The above-mentioned factors determine an individual's behavior, and by changing the attitudes of individuals, it is possible to alter unhealthy behaviors towards more healthy behaviors [16, 17].

Objective

Considering the importance of attachment styles in family function, this study aimed to determine the predictive power of TPB on attachment styles in housewives referring to health centers in Birjand City, Eastern Iran. The results can be effective in identifying the attachment style of individuals before marriage and pushing them toward a secure attachment style, as well as paying more attention to individuals' happiness and identifying the ways to achieve more happiness and joy.

Materials and Methods

This descriptive-analytical study was conducted in 2016 on 200 housewives referring to health centers in Birjand City. The

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participants were selected through the stratified cluster sampling method. Considering the socio-cultural context of Birjand City, this city was divided into two regions of north and south, and then two centers were selected from each region. Next, 50 samples were selected in each center using random sampling method, random numbers table, and the list of individuals (household case numbers). The inclusion criteria involved married housewives who were at least able to read and write. Data collection was conducted through self-report method using Collins and Read's Adult Attachment Style Questionnaire (RASS) and a researcher-made questionnaire in accordance with the TPB constructs.

Collins and Read's Adult Attachment Scale was used in this study to examine the attachment styles. This questionnaire was designed in 1990 by Collins and Read [18] and was reviewed by them in 1996. The theoretical basis of this questionnaire is the attachment theory. This scale examines the individuals' assessment of communication skills and their intimate relationship style. The scale consists of 18 statements, and the respondents express their degrees of agreement or disagreement with each of the statements based on a five-point Likert scale. This questionnaire has three sub-scales: Dependency sub-scale (D), which shows the degree of confidence and reliance of the subject to others, Closeness sub-scale (C), which measures the degree of intimacy and emotional closeness of the subject with others, and Anxiety sub-scale (A), which measures the degree of an individual's concern for rejection. Each of the sub-scales has six statements. The test-retest reliability coefficient of this test was reported as 0.68, 0.71 and 0.52 for each of the three subscales of closeness, dependency and anxiety, respectively. The reliability level of this questionnaire in Iran was evaluated by using a test-retest method as a correlation between two implementations on a sample of 100 subjects with a one-month interval, and it was indicated that the difference between the two implementations of A, D and C scales in RASS was not significant; the test was reliable at 95% level [19].

The researcher-made questionnaire included demographic information, 10 questions about attitude *(my husband is a good listener, my husband understands my mood and is compatible with it, etc.)*, 6 questions about subjective norms *(my husband's family interferes in our life, my husband's family is indifferent to me, etc.)*, 5 questions about perceived behavioral control *(I can express my inner feelings to my husband, it's easy for me to share my opposite views with my husband, etc.)* and 2 questions about behavioral intention *(I intend to try to increase my marital satisfaction, etc.)*. The questions were designed in the form of a 5-point Likert scale and were

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scored from 1 to 5; the highest score in the positive questions was assigned to "Strongly Agree" answers, and the highest score in the negative questions was assigned to "Strongly Disagree" answers. In the behavioral intention questions, "Yes" was assigned the highest score. In order to determine the validity of the researcher-made questionnaire, the content and face validity method was used. This questionnaire was handed to some faculty members of Birjand University of Medical Sciences, and the errors and ambiguities of the questionnaire were corrected, and its CVR and CVI were confirmed. The reliability of the questionnaire was evaluated by Cronbach's alpha test and the internal consistency method by performing a pilot study on 20 women in the city of Birjand who were similar to the target population in terms of the inclusion criteria. The internal correlation coefficient of each of the constructs was determined by using Cronbach's alpha formula for attitude (0.8), subjective norms (0.7) and perceived behavioral control (0.7) constructs. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS-19 software, descriptive statistical tests, Pearson correlation coefficient, one-way ANOVA and ANCOVA test at the significance level of less than 0.05.

Results

The target group of this study included 200 housewives referring to health centers in Birjand in 2016. The mean age of the participating women was 30.81±7.21 years, and the mean age of their husbands was 34.24±7.18 years. The average age of marriage was 21.13±3.51 years, and the average duration of marriage was 9.25±6.87 years. The mean score of attachment was 3.04±0.34.

Pearson's correlation coefficient showed that there was a positive significant relation between attitude construct and avoidant attachment style, and a negative significant relation between attitude construct and anxious attachment style. There was also a positive significant correlation between the perceived behavioral control construct and avoidant attachment style, and a negative significant relation between perceived behavioral control construct and anxious attachment style (Table 1).

The analysis of covariance was used in order to determine the predictive power of various constructs of TPB and demographic variables for attachment styles. The results showed that from among the TPB constructs, attitude and subjective norm predicted 6.7% of avoidant attachment style, attitude construct predicted 4.6% of anxious attachment style, and such demographic variables as husband's age, and husband's occupation and age at marriage predicted 7% of attachment styles (Table 2).

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Table 1: Correlation matrix of the constructs of the theory of planned behavior and attachment styles

	Attitude	Subjective norm	Perceived behavioral control	Secure	Avoidant	Anxious
Attitude	1					
Subjective norm	-0.025	1				
Perceived behavioral control	0.576**	0.006	1			
Secure	0.095	-0.041	0.084	1		
Avoidant	0.236**	0.139	0.161*	0.111	1	
Anxious	-0.227**	-0.043	-0.225**	-0.152*	-0.147*	1

$P \leq 0.001$ ** , *$P \leq 0.05$

Table 2: Determination of the predictive power of the constructs of the theory of planned behavior for the attachment styles of housewives

Variable	R	R_{ad}^2	Model constant coefficient	P
Attitude and subjective norm (Avoidant style)	0.277	0.067	2.52	0.0001
Attitude (Anxious style)	0.227	0.046	3.71	0.001

The results of one-way ANOVA for attachment styles and demographic variables showed that secure attachment style had a statistically significant relationship with the women's education (P=0.01), husband's education (P=0.007), and husband's occupation (P=0.04) and income level (P=0.01). Also the anxious attachment style had a statistically significant relationship with income level (P=0.02).

Pearson's correlation coefficient showed a significant negative relationship between anxious attachment and marriage duration (r=-0.145), and a significant positive relationship between secure attachment and the age at marriage (r =0.180) at the significance level of 0.05, but there was no statistically significant relationship between the attachment styles and age, husband's age and number of children.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine the predictive power of TPB on the attachment style of housewives. In this study, from among the variables of TPB, the two constructs of attitude and subjective norm predicted 6.7% of the avoidant attachment style, and the attitude construct predicted 4.6% of the anxious attachment style. The constructs of this theory were not strong predictors of the attachment styles. In explaining this matter, it can be said that human behavior is a reflection of various factors, and the domain of this causal network is so broad that it changes from human to human and from group to group, and as stated by Bowlby, attachment is formed on the basis of early childhood experiences and a kind of sense of security by interacting with caretakers, which promotes the growth of active internal patterns and involves

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information about themselves, others, and communication between them. Bowlby assumed that these patterns guide the individual's performance, especially the interpersonal performance throughout life, and in the process of doing work, and form the basis of personality. Therefore, early relationships and experiences will affect future experiences of life in the form of attachment [20-22]. Therefore, the results indicate that there are other indirect and influential factors effective on the type of attachment style and its symbolic behaviors.

Although the constructs of TPB were not strong predictors of the attachment styles, the existence of a correlation between the theoretical constructs and the attachment styles as a preliminary study can suggest the need for more extensive studies in this area.

In the present study, there was a positive significant correlation between the perceived behavioral control and attitude constructs and the anxious attachment style. Attitude indicates the level of desirability or undesirability of a behavior from an individual's point of view, and perceived behavioral control is the degree to which an individual feels that s/he has voluntary control over doing or not doing an action [23]. Positive attitude and perceived behavioral control over the ability to conduct a behavior or not allow those with an avoidant attachment style who have avoidance, idealism and self-reliance characteristics to have fewer problems through avoiding conflict situations in interpersonal relationships [12].

The results revealed a significant negative correlation between the attitude and perceived behavioral control constructs and the anxious attachment style. The anxious attachment style is the result of negative and uncertain attitudes and the presence of primary maladaptive schemas toward attachment figures due to one's behavior in childhood. Unsecure people are persistently concerned about being rejected by an attachment figure. They record this feature in their in-person model and adhere to this pattern in adulthood in communication with others [24, 25]. However, Radmehr's findings indicated a significant and inverse correlation between the mean scores of avoidant attachment style and the scores derived from healthy behavior and attitude, but there was no significant relationship between anxious attachment style and attitude. This inconsistency may be due to cultural differences in the studied populations.

Another finding of the present study was that there was a negative and significant relationship between anxious attachment and duration of marriage, and a positive and significant relationship between secure attachment and age at marriage. In the study by Demir, older participants had a higher secure attachment mean score than younger ones, and

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there was a significant and reverse correlation between the anxious style and the age, so that with the increase in age, the prevalence of anxious style was lower among the samples [26]. Saymas also reported that the mean score of secure style in the students aged 22 years and older was higher than in the students aged 17-19 years [27]. These results are consistent with the results of the present study, and indicate a higher prevalence of secure style in people who have longer marriage duration. Major changes in the individuals' life and their encounter with certain conditions such as being in a very different environment during the years of life can have a significant effect on changing their attachment styles [6]. It seems that the increase in the duration of marriage and dealing with different life situations and the increase in individuals' experiences lead to a more secure attachment [28].

This study is the first research to examine the application of TPB in women's attachment style. Designing broader research in this area is recommended because, due to the lack of studies, it was not possible to compare this research with similar researches in the field of TPB.

Conclusion

Given that the initial developmental experiences of individuals in the family are effective in shaping the attachment style, the results of this study indicate that there are other indirect and influential factors on the type of attachment style and its symbolic behaviors. TPB can be effective in designing educational interventions by identifying the family stability and solidity-related factors, and through relying on the modification of an attachment style, counselors can play a major role in selecting and resolving the conflicts between couples before and after marriage.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgements

This study is derived from a master's thesis approved by the Research Council of Birjand University of Medical Sciences under code No. B9505. The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Department of Research and Technology of Birjand University of Medical Sciences for the financial support of the project, the officials and personnel of the health centers in Birjand, all respectable women participating in the study, and all those who helped us in implementing this research.

Authors' contributions

- Study concept and design: Tahereh Asadollahi, Mohammad Reza Miri, Ensiyeh

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- Acquisition of data: Tahereh Asadollahi, Tayebeh Hosseini
- Analysis and interpretation of data: Tahereh Asadollahi, Gholamreza Sharifzade
- Drafting of the manuscript: Tahereh Asadollahi
- Critical revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content: Mohammad Reza Miri, Ensiyeh Norozi, Tayebeh Hosseini
- Statistical analysis: Tahereh Asadollahi, Gholamreza Sharifzade.

Funding/Support

This study was supported by Birjand University of Medical Sciences.

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