



## **Exploring the Distribution & Stability of Self-Reported Attachment Styles during Adolescence and Their Relationship with Resilience**

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### **Introduction:**

- A central component of attachment theory is the concept of continuity, which posits that early childhood attachment experiences are strongly associated with building relationships with others &/or emotional regulation throughout life.
- Recent research studies indicate that adolescents with different attachment styles regulate emotions as well as relate to others in ways related to their particular attachment style
- Insecurely attached adolescents, who perceive others as untrustworthy &/or the self as unworthy, are at greater risk for emotional and behavioural problems (e.g. mental illness and substance misuse).
- There is strong reason to believe that attachment styles are strongly associated with resiliency. Secure attachment style is a possible characteristic of resilience, which may protect individual wellbeing in the face of adversity. For example, study findings have shown that individuals with patterns of secure attachment are more likely to effectively regulate emotions and relate to others in constructive ways.
- In the present study, we sought to examine the potential for integrating the psychosocial characteristics of specific attachment styles into tailored resilience-based early intervention and prevention strategies.

### **Research Objectives:**

In a large mainstream population of adolescents, the objectives of this study were to:

- Describe the distribution of attachment styles;
- Examine the stability of attachment styles over a 6 month period;
- Quantify levels of resilience across the different attachment styles.

## **Methods:**

### *Participants and Study Procedure*

- The British Columbia Adolescent Substance Use Survey (BASUS) is an internet-based prospective cohort study of adolescent substance use.
- 65 BC high-schools participated in this study with 1,102 participants (62% female) completing Waves 6 and 7 which were roughly 6 months apart. Of these students, 42% were in grade 9 and 56% were in grade 10.
- Students self-reported on a wide range of questions regarding family, community, school, and peers, as well as their attitudes and experiences with alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana.

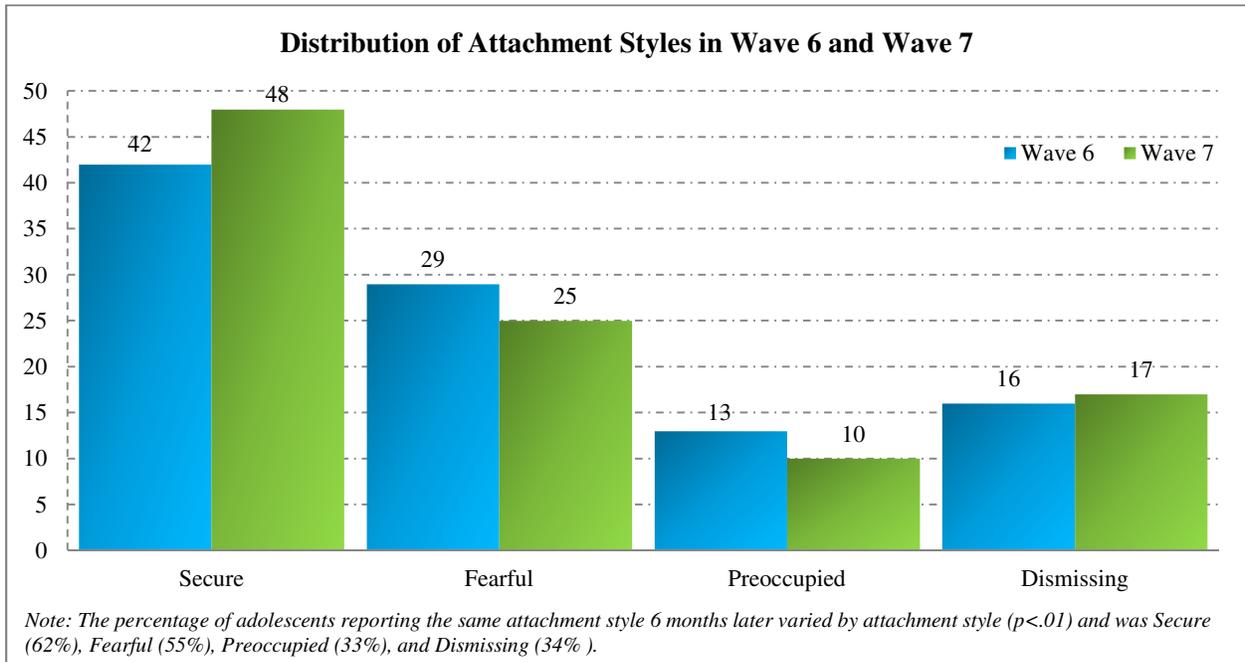
### *Measurements*

- The Relationship Questionnaire (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) is a single item measure made of 4 short paragraphs each describing a prototypical attachment pattern (e.g. Secure, Fearful, Preoccupied, & Dismissing). Participants rate their degree of agreement to each attachment pattern on a 7-point scale. For example, a participant could rate him or herself as follows: Secure 6, Fearful 3, Preoccupied 2, Dismissing 5. These scores provide a profile of attachment patterns.
- The Resilience Scale (Wagnild & Young, 1993) is a 25-item instrument of the extent to which individuals self-report five essential characteristics of resilience. These characteristics include meaningful life (purpose); perseverance; self reliance; equanimity; and coming home to yourself (existential aloneness). This measure has been viewed as one which assesses protective factors to prevent or delay the onset of mental health problems and substance misuse.

### *Data Analysis*

- Frequencies of each self-identified attachment style were calculated for Waves 6 and 7. A chi-square analysis was used to examine the changes in distribution of self reported attachment styles from Wave 6 to Wave 7.
- One way analysis of variance was used to compare resiliency scores across attachment styles in Wave 7 data.

## Results



<i>Attachment Style</i>	<i>Resilience Score (95% CI)</i>
Secure	79 (78-80)
Fearful	69 (67-71)
Preoccupied	68 (66-70)
Dismissing	76 (73-78)

$F(3, 1098) = 32.06, p < .001$

## Conclusions

- The stability of self-reported attachment style appears to vary by style with the most stable appearing to be Secure and Fearful.
- Study findings show a medium to large association between level of resilience and attachment style
- Researchers should consider tailoring resilience-based interventions to address the psychosocial characteristics of adolescents with Fearful and Preoccupied attachment styles.