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Spousal attachment style and the level of marital satisfaction in parents of preschool and early school children in rural and urban settings[1]

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Abstract: The article addresses the issues of relationships between spousal attachment style and marital satisfaction in spouses living in rural and urban settings and raising at least one preschool-age or early school-age child. Research was conducted among 131 married couples (262 individuals), using the *Attachment Styles Questionnaire* by Mieczysław Plopa and the *Well-Matched Marriage Questionnaire* developed by Mieczysław Plopa and Jan Rostowski. The results indicated significant relationships between secure spousal attachment style and overall marital satisfaction level and a relationship between avoidant style and a high level of disappointment in marriage.
Keywords: attachment, attachment style, secure attachment style, marital satisfaction, marital relations, family functioning

Introduction

A review of the literature on attachment indicates that in recent years there has been a growing interest in the significance of close bonds in interpersonal relationships, not only in childhood but also in different periods of human development (Plopa, 2011; Rostowski, 2003). Scholars have been looking for mechanisms explaining the formation of close bonds in adulthood (Karbowa-Płowens, 2019). Accordingly, attachment can be treated as a prototype of adult social relationships, and a favorable attachment pattern in childhood probably results in plasticity to new relationships and experiences. It can therefore be assumed that the affective regulation pattern in early childhood relations with the caregiver constitutes the emotional basis and, consequently, a kind of prototype for self-regulation in adult life (Goldberg, 2000; Plopa, 2014), especially in marital relationships. The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between spousal attachment style and satisfaction with different dimensions of the marital relationship: intimacy, self-fulfillment, similarity, and disappointment.

1. Spousal attachment

The attachment theory has enjoyed interest for years, particularly among developmental psychologists. Its author, John Bowlby (2016), defined attachment as a bond with an individual of the same species and posited that it had a biological basis. It can therefore be assumed that the bonds between a child and their primary caregiver, most often the mother, are manifestations of behavioral system activity, resulting in the child's need for closeness with the mother. Bowlby (2016) treats it as a genetically determined and primordially rooted need. From the evolutionary perspective, genetically programmed behavior

1 Article in Polish language: https://stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/62P_marm.pdf

patterns or predispositions to learn them in the course of first social interactions are activated early in individuals of various species, which is related to the adaptive function of bonds and to the role of early experiences in the development of individuals' resources (Goldberg, 2000). Thus, attachment is a behavior system that organizes an individual's feelings towards the caregiver in childhood and may induce many positive emotions (Taylor, 2019). Based on these early experiences, the child develops an internal operating model, which is a mental representation of the predicted course of interactions with the people around them. From the moment of its emergence, the model becomes a template for social bonds that is used in the subsequent stages of development.

Research on attachment concerns mainly the mother-child dyad (Włodarczyk, 2016). It leads to the conclusion that breaking the emotional bond with the mother or the lack of such a bond causes negative and essentially irreversible outcomes for the child's development (Czub, 2003). The loss of maternal care results in mental anguish and pain, which the child may show with their behavior, through crying, violent protests, and refusal to accept caregivers other than the mother (Marchwicki, 2004, 2006).

Based on observations concerning the mother-child relationship, simultaneously considering the quality of this relationship and the mother's sensitivity and availability when the child signals his or her needs, Mary Ainsworth (2015) distinguished three attachment styles. The secure style is characterized by trust in the object of attachment, which stems from the object's availability in the areas of sensitivity in situations when the child experiences discomfort. The anxious-ambivalent style develops when the child experiences uncertainty about the mother's/caregiver's availability; it then produces what is calle "hypervigilance," a lowered sense of security, and separation anxiety, which can manifest itself even in situations when the mother is available. Finally, the avoidant style is associated with experiencing the unavailability of the object of attachment or the object's insensitivity in situations of threat or an unsatisfied need. Such situations activate defense mechanisms and, consequently, lead to the avoidance of close contact as a form of protection against being hurt. In this case, separation does not have to trigger negative emotions (Plopa, 2008). The avoidant style develops when the caregivers are indifferent and uncommitted. The child develops a belief that he or she is not worthy of love, that other people are not particularly available, and that contacts with them lead to failure and frustration (Adamczyk, 2016). The described attachment styles explain the significance of trust and security in social relationships and generalize an individual's internal expectations regarding how to function in interactions with others. In this context, it is reasonable to assert that a specific attachment style formed in childhood as a prototype of interpersonal relationships serves as a foundation for intimate relationships in adulthood. Naturally, it should be noted that this relational prototype may undergo modifications throughout subsequent life stages as a result of new experiences. Moreover, adult romantic relationships possess a distinct specificity, as they are based on mutuality and the reciprocal exchange of caregiving without the necessity of the partner's physical presence (Byra & Parchoniuk, 2015). Different attachment styles either support or disrupt interpersonal behaviors in adulthood and become particularly salient in the context of partners' functioning within a romantic relationship and their perceived relationship satisfaction.

Marta Komorowska-Pudło (2016) analyzed previous studies, paying special attention to the significance of upbringing styles for individuals' development; her analysis indicates that the secure attachment style is associated with a high sense of security later in life, higher self-esteem, trust, emotional maturity, openness to others, and the belief that one can count on and receive help from others. The anxious-ambivalent style results in a lowered sense of security, heightened vigilance, lower self-esteem, shyness, withdrawal, and susceptibility to stress. The avoidant style leads to difficulties in relations with others later in life, uncertainty, irritability, and impulsiveness. Thus, childhood is the period when a person develops their characteristic matrix of conduct and a characteristic pattern of how they treat themselves. The experience of being treated like an object by others leads to the loss of independence and limits the sense of freedom (Ryś, 2014).

Bowlby assumed that this early childhood attachment to a parent or caregiver might have an effect on bonds in adult life, which means a tendency for the attachment patterns that develop between adult partners in romantic relationships to be similar to those that previously existed between the mother or a different caregiver and the child (as cited in Karbowa-Płowens, 2019; Liberska & Suwalska, 2011; Malina, 2011; Suwalska-Barancewicz, 2016a). The experience of attachment can be an important element in the formation of personal resources (Goldberg, 2000), especially personal openness, and other broadly defined social behaviors.

The concept of attachment became the basis for the understanding of adults' love and loneliness, based on the assumption that the depth of this loneliness was influenced by the history of attachment relationships in childhood (Shaver & Hazan, 1987), and love began to be treated as an attachment process. This means that romantic relationships are governed by mechanisms similar to those governing the infant-mother relationship, which leads to the conclusion that adults also feel secure and display creative behaviors when their partner is available and sensitive to their needs. A romantic partner is a source of security and protection and provides a sense of comfort.

Chris Fraley and Phillip Shaver (2000) adapted the attachment patterns defined by Mary Ainsworth to describe different styles of love in adults – namely, individual differences in thinking, feeling, and behaving in romantic relationships. In their opinion, there are three types of attachment here as well: avoidant attachment – associated with a lack of comfort in closeness with the partner, difficulties in showing complete trust in the partner, and a lack of consent to complete dependence on him of her; secure attachment – leading to the experience of satisfaction with the close relationship and to the acceptance of behaviors aimed at greater intimacy; and anxious-ambivalent attachment – associated with the feeling that the partner does not show willingness to enter into the expected intimate relationship, which leads to irritation and to undermining the partner's positive feelings and his or her desire to be in a close relationship.

The research conducted by Blanka Chrobaczyńska (2018) indicated a correlation between secure attachment style and the character of the marital relationship, assessed in terms of features such as intimacy, passion, commitment, and spouse deprecation. The results showed that there were significant relationships between secure spousal attachment style and the levels of marital intimacy, passion, and commitment. However, this relationship was not confirmed for depreciation. Significant associations between insecure attachment style and the characteristics of the marital relationship were not found, either.

In turn, a study conducted by Alicja Malina and Dorota Suwalska-Barancewicz (2017) revealed statistically significant relationships between the anxious-ambivalent attachment style and life satisfaction ($r = -.199$; $p = .027$). It was found that as the intensity of the anxious-ambivalent attachment style increased, participants' life satisfaction decreased.

2. Marital satisfaction and its determinants

Marriage is a unique and at the same time the most important subsystem of the family system, composed of adults from two different families of origin who have decided to start a relationship with each other in order to live together (Plopa, 2008). It is usually a lasting relationship, and at the same time a dynamic one that develops through interactions, the performance of tasks, and striving towards certain values (Krok, 2015).

Marital satisfaction is the case when both the man and the woman feel happy and are satisfied with each other (Zadeh & Tabrizi, 2014). It is, however, not an easy concept to define, and it is described using terms such as marital quality, marital adjustment, marital success, and a well-matched marriage (Bukalski, 2013; Stanley et al., 2012). In the Polish context, Jan Rostowski (2009) is particularly noteworthy for having proposed, as early as the 1980s, the concept of a well-matched marriage, which refers to successful or unsuccessful marital life across various dimensions, including love, commitment, intimacy,

similarity, attractiveness, sexual relations, having children, and partner selection motives. According to Maria Ryś (2004), communication between spouses must not be overlooked. She emphasizes that high-quality relationships are characterized by strong closeness – emotional and intellectual – as well as closeness related to the performance of everyday tasks and shared activities. Furthermore, the quality of communication between partners is associated with attachment style. Research has shown that individuals with a secure attachment style are perceived as supportive and communicatively engaged partners who are less likely to be demeaning (Suwalska-Barancewicz & Malina, 2018).

Marital quality can be assessed on several dimensions. Mieczysław Plopa and Jan Rostowski (2008) proposed four dimensions: intimacy, self-fulfillment, similarity, and disappointment. Intimacy is the first dimension contributing to marital quality. It consists in satisfaction with being in a close relationship based on openness, mutual trust, and honesty. This kind of intimate relationship is based on true love and motivates the spouses to care for it in order to be happy in it. The second dimension is self-fulfillment, which means that in marriage it is possible to fulfill oneself and be oneself and to have one's own values, beliefs and personal life plans, and that performing marital and family roles does not collide with this. On the contrary, it becomes a way to live a fulfilling and happy life. The third dimension is similarity, which indicates a high degree of agreement between the partners. The spouses are able to define their important marital and family goals together and without conflict; the goals include the ways of bringing up children, family traditions, spending free time, or setting family boundaries. They can specify how to develop their relationship in a satisfying manner and share their household duties. The last dimension is disappointment, associated with a sense of failure in life caused by entering into a marriage perceived as limiting the individual's autonomy. In such a marriage, thoughts about divorce appear frequently; the spouses avoid each other and experience no pleasure of being together; consequently, they feel increasingly less responsible for their relationship. The study by Anna Wańczyk-Welc and Małgorzata Marmola (2020) demonstrates a correlation between the quality of the marital relationship and the functioning of the family of origin. The experience of growing up in a family of origin that guarantees a sense of autonomy, is coherent, communicates properly, and has a sense of identity becomes a condition of high marital quality in adult life. This suggests the repetition of certain patterns, which has an effect on performing family and marital roles in specific ways.

Graham Spanier and Robert Lewis (1980), who are considered precursors of marital quality research, pointed to partners' sense of integration, satisfaction, adjustment, and communication as elements that the marital relationship rests on. According to Maria Braun-Gałkowska (1992), it is possible to identify the factors that contribute to a successful marital relationship, which simultaneously determine its quality. According to the author, these include factors that operate prior to marriage, such as marital maturity and partner selection, as well as factors that operate during the course of marriage – both internal and external to the relationship itself. Awareness of these factors can support intentional actions aimed at ensuring the longevity of the relationship, fostering satisfaction, and promoting marital happiness. Research by Renata Doniec (2001) indicates that the most important factors contributing to marital success are mutual understanding, tolerance, and love, as they foster effective communication and thus help prevent conflicts and dysfunctional interpersonal interactions.

The research conducted by Mieczysław Plopa (2008) indicates that the motives for partner selection are crucial for relationship satisfaction and marital stability. Long-lasting marriages were typically based on love and the desire to have a family; for wives, the partner's character was particularly important, while for husbands, sexual satisfaction played a more significant role. The author concluded that stable marriages more often relied on values such as love and shared interests, whereas in unsuccessful relationships, these values were of lesser importance. A higher level of marital satisfaction was also observed among individuals who had good relationships with their mothers (the relationship with the father did not show significant correlations). Additionally, material resources were found to be a factor associated with marital satisfaction.

The findings highlight the role of partner personality traits as determinants of marital success. Andrzej Dakowicz (2014) highlights temperamental traits, attitudes, and self-image as predictors of both high and low relationship quality. Maria Braun-Gałkowska (1992) identifies the maturity and activity of the spouses as the primary determinants of marital success – factors that require continuous effort and daily commitment from both partners in order to nurture marital love – while personality similarity is considered of lesser importance. A good marriage involves supporting the partner (Dakowicz & Dakowicz, 2021), which increases individuals' marital satisfaction and psychological well-being (Karakose, 2022). Marital satisfaction may also depend on good communication between the spouses (Dakowicz & Dakowicz, 2021; Omoboye, Eneh, Titor-Addingi, 2024; Plopa, 2008; Rostowska, 2001). An effective way of communicating means active exchange of information, reflects commitment and represents the emotional climate in the relationship (expressing the feeling of love) and the levels of trust, support, concern, and respect for the partner; it also favors the quicker resolution of conflicts and generally reduces them (Dakowicz, 2014; Taggart et al., 2019).

A review of studies on marital satisfaction conducted by Lila Fotovate and Zahra Khezri (2018) indicates that a successful marriage positively influences the psychological well-being of spouses. Greater satisfaction may result from the use of mindfulness techniques and spending quality time together. Certain aspects of premarital sexuality were also found to be related to relationship quality: cohabitation before marriage influenced marital quality, whereas its effect on relationship stability was limited.

Very interesting results were obtained in cross-cultural research conducted in 33 countries (Dobrowolska et al., 2020). It turned out that greater marital satisfaction was associated with a smaller number of negative experiences in the relationship, better communication, high mutual support and advice in the dyad, fewer symptoms of stress, and generally better health. Regardless of culture, men were more satisfied with marriage (which resulted from the unequal division of duties, including childcare). Satisfaction also varied depending on the stage of marriage and spouses' age and correlated negatively with their socioeconomic status. Moreover, the authors of the study pointed out the different perception of the roles of the family and spouses in collectivistic cultures – in such cultures, satisfaction was derived from living in multigenerational homes, where all family members lived together, helped one another, and were loyal to and cooperated with one another. In individualistic cultures, by contrast, marriage was perceived as satisfying when it contributed to the autonomy and independence of husband and wife. Marital satisfaction was also positively correlated with religiosity. From a cross-cultural perspective, marital satisfaction was found not to be significantly related to the number of children (this relationship is probably moderated by other variables) and to spouses' level of education.

The research conducted by Amber Jarnecke and Susan South (2013) suggested that there was an intergenerational transmission of marital satisfaction, which meant that parents' marital satisfaction translated into that of their adult child. However, the mechanisms explaining this phenomenon remain relatively unknown. The authors tested the role of parent-child attachment orientation and romantic relationship attachment orientation as mediators in the intergenerational transmission of marital satisfaction. The results partially supported the mediation effect of parent-child attachment and romantic partner attachment on intergenerational marital satisfaction transmission, though the effects differed depending on gender. In the case of husbands, the direct effect of parents' marital satisfaction on respondents' marital satisfaction partially depended on anxious attachment styles. There was no direct effect of parents on the marital satisfaction of wives; however, there were significant associations between parents' satisfaction and wives' attachment orientation in childhood and adulthood, which in turn influenced their marital satisfaction. The results of that study allowed for an integrated look at the relationship between attachment and marital functioning.

In a 31-year longitudinal study, Eva Klohnen and Stephan Bera (1998) investigated attachment styles in 52-year-old women with avoidant or secure attachment, considering several factors: life satisfaction,

behavior descriptions, personality traits, and self-report. The researchers collected data from women at the age of 21, 27, 43, and 52 years. The results from these diverse sources of data provided evidence of the continuity of behavior and experience patterns associated with attachment styles in adulthood. Compared to secure attachment style, the avoidant style among female respondents was characteristic of less happy and less lasting relationships, greater defensiveness and sensitivity, distrustful self-reliance, and greater interpersonal and emotional distance. Research indicated that their environment in childhood offered fewer opportunities to develop close interpersonal bonds, which translated into a worse quality of such bonds in adulthood.

Numerous studies have shown that marital satisfaction is a product of many factors: individual, interpersonal, and cultural. Sohrab Zarrin and Maryam Theri (2020) predicted marital satisfaction based on communication patterns, attachment styles, and psychological resilience, which were found in studies to have high predictive value. Based on these variables, it is possible to improve relationship quality, since its high level correlates with constructive communication, secure attachment style, and high psychological resilience. Marital satisfaction is significantly and negatively correlated with anxious attachment style and mutual communication avoidance.

Expanding the analysis of marital satisfaction and its determinants, it is worth considering an additional aspect related to changes in the quality of the marital relationship over time. In the initial phase of family life, before children are born, spouses tend to perceive their shared life as highly satisfying. It is only after the birth of the first and subsequent children that numerous adjustments become necessary, which may lead to a decline in satisfaction due to the demands of childcare, lack of time for each other, and, in some cases, worsened financial circumstances (Abele & Wojciszke, 2018; Weryszko, 2020). A key factor that supports the transition from a childless phase to parenthood is the attachment style, which is associated with both declared and perceived partner empathy (Kaźmierczak, 2015). According to the findings of Alicja Malina and Dorota Suwalska-Barancewicz (2017), instrumental support also plays a significant role for spouses raising children. The authors describe this support as the provision of everyday help with childcare and household duties. In this context, the importance of emotional bonding tends to decrease, thereby changing the nature of the relationship between partners.

3. Methodological assumptions of the present study

Our study was devoted to the relationship between spouses' attachment styles and their marital satisfaction. The research aim was to examine attachment styles and the level of satisfaction in spouses living in rural and urban settings, who were at the same time parents of preschool and early school children, and to determine the relationships between these variables. The main problem was the following question:

- Are there statistically significant relationships between attachment styles in marriage and the level of marital satisfaction in spouses living in urban and rural settings, bringing up preschool and early school children?

We formulated the following detailed questions:

1. What marital attachment styles are found in spouses bringing up preschool and early school children? Are there significant differences in attachment styles between women and men?
2. What attachment styles are displayed by spouses living in rural and urban settings? Are there statistically significant differences between spouses living in rural and urban settings?
3. What is the level of marital satisfaction among spouses raising preschool and early school-aged children? What level of marital satisfaction is reported by wives, and what by husbands?
4. What level of marital satisfaction is found in spouses living in rural and urban settings? Are there statistically significant differences in marital satisfaction between spouses living in rural and urban settings?

The following hypotheses were formulated:

- The main hypothesis of the research: there are statistically significant relationships between marital attachment styles and the level of marital satisfaction among spouses residing in urban and rural areas.

Detailed hypotheses resulting from the main hypothesis are:

1. It is assumed that the dominant attachment style among the participants is the secure style; that the avoidant style occurs more frequently among husbands than wives; and that the anxious-ambivalent style is more common among wives than among men.
2. It is assumed that there are significant differences in attachment styles between spouses from rural and urban areas. Spouses living in rural areas are expected to exhibit the secure attachment style more often than those from urban areas.
3. It is assumed that the studied parents will demonstrate high levels of marital satisfaction. Wives are expected to score higher on the disappointment scale, while husbands are expected to score higher on intimacy and self-actualization.
4. It is presumed that there are statistically significant differences in marital satisfaction between spouses from rural and urban areas. It is expected that spouses from urban settings will report higher levels of marital disappointment and also a higher level of self-actualization than spouses from rural areas.

Research was conducted among 131 married couples from the Podkarpacie region (a total of 262 individuals, including 65 couples residing in rural areas and 66 couples living in urban areas). The age of the participants ranged from 23 to 57 years, with an average age of 37.6 years (men: 24-57 years, M = 39; women: 23-49 years, M = 36.5). The length of marriage among participants ranged from 1 to 35 years, with a mean duration of 12 years. Twenty-six participants came from single-parent families, while the remainder were from two-parent households. The inclusion criterion for the study group was that the couples were raising at least one child of preschool or early school age. The number of children in the participants' families ranged from 1 to 6.

To assess marital attachment styles, the *Attachment Styles Questionnaire* by Mieczysław Plopa was used. This tool identifies three styles of attachment to one's spouse: secure, anxious-ambivalent, and avoidant:

1. Secure attachment style – is associated with satisfaction in the relationship with one's partner, the belief that the partner is available in important, difficult, or crisis situations, mutual expressions of affection and attachment, and communication based on openness and mutual trust.
2. Anxious-ambivalent attachment style – is characterized by anxiety about the stability of the relationship, fear of losing the partner, and constant worry that the relationship may not be attractive or important enough for the partner. This style also involves heightened vigilance, often unjustified, stemming from a lowered sense of security.
3. Avoidant attachment style – involves a lack of tendency to form close, open relationships with the spouse, discomfort when the partner seeks closeness, and a preference for clearly defined boundaries – whose violation is perceived as irritating. Individuals with this style often lack spontaneity and openness to intimate dialogue (Plopa, 2008).

The questionnaire demonstrates high reliability across all dimensions, with a reliability coefficient of 0.91 for the secure attachment style, 0.78 for the anxious-ambivalent style, and 0.80 for the avoidant style. Satisfactory results were also obtained in terms of the questionnaire's validity, which was assessed through theoretical validity, analysis of the internal structure of the test, examination of intergroup differences, and criterion validity methods (Plopa, 2008).

To assess the level of marital satisfaction, the *Well-Matched Marriage Questionnaire* developed by Mieczysław Plopa and Jan Rostowski was used. The questionnaire allows for the calculation of a general marital satisfaction score as well as scores on four subscales:

1. *Intimacy* – refers to satisfaction with a close relationship with one's partner, the need to build a relationship based on closeness, trust, and openness toward the partner, high motivation to work on the relationship, and a commitment to the partner's happiness.
2. *Self-fulfillment* – refers to perceiving marriage as an opportunity for self-fulfillment, for achieving life goals and expressing personal values. Through the realization of marital roles, one experiences satisfaction from being the person one wants to be, and marriage is seen as a path to a happy life.
3. *Similarity* – reflects a high level of agreement between partners regarding marital and family goals, and shared views on developing the relationship, spending free time, child-rearing practices, and maintaining family traditions.
4. *Disappointment* – reflects a sense of life failure due to the marriage, lack of pleasure in being with the partner, feelings of restricted autonomy and independence, and thoughts of ending the relationship (Plopa, 2008).

The applied questionnaire demonstrated satisfactory reliability: 0.89 for the *Intimacy* scale, 0.88 for the *Disappointment* scale, 0.83 for the *Self-fulfillment* scale, and 0.81 for the *Similarity* scale. Validity testing (including theoretical validity, internal structure, intergroup differences, and criterion validity) also yielded satisfactory results (Plopa, 2008).

For statistical analyses, the Shapiro-Wilk test was used to assess the normality of distributions, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to assess differences between groups, and Spearman's rho correlation coefficient was applied.

4. Results

Based on the results of the Shapiro-Wilk test, presented in Table 1., it can be concluded that the distributions of scores on both the attachment style scales and the marital satisfaction scales deviate from normality. Therefore, subsequent analyses employed the Mann-Whitney U test and Spearman's rho coefficient.

Table 1. Shapiro-Wilk test values for scales measuring attachment styles and marital satisfaction

Scale	Shapiro-Wilk Test	Significance
Secure style	0.924	< 0.001
Anxious-ambivalent style	0.990	0.060
Avoidant style	0.928	< 0.001
Intimacy	0.897	< 0.001
Self-fulfillment	0.856	< 0.001
Similarity	0.879	< 0.001
Disappointment	0.948	< 0.001

4.1. Respondents' spousal attachment styles

The attachment styles of the test subjects are shown in Table 2. It presents both raw and sten results, along with standard deviations – for the entire group under study and for the subgroups by gender.

The results presented in Table 2 indicate that the highest scores among the surveyed spouses were observed in the secure attachment style (high levels of relationship satisfaction, expressions of affection and attachment, and the belief in the partner's availability in difficult situations), average scores were recorded for the anxious-ambivalent attachment style (moderate levels of concern about relationship stability, fear of losing the partner, and vigilance), and low scores were found for the avoidant attachment style (spouses do not tend to avoid contact with their partner). Attention should be drawn to the high standard deviation values, which indicate considerable variability in the results, particularly within the secure attachment style dimension. The findings point to the predominance of the secure attachment style in both male and female subgroups. In the case of the anxious-ambivalent style, average scores were observed in both subgroups; however, statistically significant differences were found between men and women, with significantly higher scores among women. Scores for the avoidant attachment style in both subgroups remained within the low range.

Both spouses residing in rural and urban areas obtained high scores in the secure attachment style, average scores in the anxious-ambivalent style, and low scores in the avoidant style (Table 3). No sta-

Table 2. Differences between male and female subgroups in terms of attachment styles

Attachment style	Total Sample				Men				Women					
	raw scores		sten scores		raw scores		sten scores		raw scores		sten scores			
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	U	p
Secure	42.24	10.51	7.87	4.67	41.87	9.87	7.79	2.18	42.62	7.95	7.94	2.31	9192	0.318
Anxious-ambivalent	24.45	8.94	4.66	2.25	23.52	8.42	4.50	2.17	25.36	9.35	4.82	2.31	9519	0.126
Avoidant	18.74	9.19	2.63	2.21	19.06	9.50	2.74	2.29	18.42	8.84	2.53	2.13	8328	0.680

Legend: U – Mann-Whitney U test; p – significance level; M – arithmetic mean; SD – standard deviation.

Table 3. Differences between subgroups of spouses residing in rural and urban areas in terms of attachment styles

Attachment style	Spouses from rural settings				Spouses from urban settings					
	raw scores		sten scores		raw scores		sten scores			
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	U	p
Secure	42.80	9.14	8.01	2.02	41.65	11.73	7.73	2.45	8465	0.852
Anxious-ambivalent	24.79	8.48	4.77	2.17	24.09	9.39	4.55	2.33	7969	0.320
Avoidant	18.54	9.26	2.63	2.20	18.94	9.10	2.64	2.23	8848	0.660

Legend: U – Mann-Whitney U test; p – significance level; M – arithmetic mean; SD – standard deviation.

Table 4. Differences between subgroups of men residing in rural and urban areas in terms of attachment styles

Attachment style	Men from rural settings				Men from urban settings					
	raw scores		sten scores		raw scores		sten scores			
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	U	p
Secure	41.91	9.32	7.83	2.11	41.81	10.42	7.75	2.26	2170	0.905
Anxious-ambivalent	24.31	8.01	4.72	2.08	22.70	8.75	4.28	2.25	1879	0.221
Avoidant	19.16	9.88	2.81	2.39	18.95	9.09	2.69	2.18	2157	0.954

Legend: U – Mann-Whitney U test; p – significance level; M – arithmetic mean; SD – standard deviation.

Table 5. Differences between subgroups of women residing in rural and urban areas in terms of attachment styles

Attachment style	Women from the countryside				Women from towns and cities					
	raw scores		sten scores		raw scores		sten scores			
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	U	p
Secure	43.71	8.85	8.18	1.91	41.51	12.89	7.70	2.62	2087	0.789
Anxious-ambivalent	25.27	8.90	4.82	2.26	25.46	9.79	4.83	2.38	2107	0.861
Avoidant	17.91	8.55	2.45	1.97	18.93	9.11	2.60	2.28	2272	0.560

Legend: U – Mann-Whitney U test; p – significance level; M – arithmetic mean; SD – standard deviation.

tistically significant differences were found between spouses living in rural and urban areas across any of the measured attachment styles.

No statistically significant differences were found in spousal attachment styles between men residing in rural areas and those living in urban areas (Table4). In both groups of male participants, relatively high scores were observed in the secure attachment style (above the 7th sten), scores close to the average (between the 4th and 5th sten) in the anxious-ambivalent style, and low scores (below the 3rd sten) in the avoidant style.

Women living in rural settings scored slightly higher on secure style and lower on ambivalent and avoidant styles, but these differences were not statistically significant (Table 5).

4.2. Marital satisfaction in spouses

The results of the surveyed spouses in terms of marital satisfaction are presented in Table 6, which includes raw and standardized (sten) mean scores, standard deviations for the entire sample and gender subgroups, as well as the Mann-Whitney U test value indicating the level of differences between the groups.

The spouses' scores were in the average range on all marital satisfaction scales included in the KDM-2. Respondents' scores were the highest on the Similarity scale, measuring harmony between the spouses in the pursuit of goals, in defining external boundaries, and in cultivating traditions and the similarity of their views – the levels of these aspects of our respondents' married life were average. The score was the lowest on the Disappointment scale – but it was also average, which may mean that there was a feeling of disappointment with spousal relations and a sense of freedom and autonomy being limited.

Husbands' and wives' scores were similar. There were no statistically significant differences between these groups on any of the KDM-2 scales. It can therefore be concluded that husbands and wives had a similar level of marital satisfaction. Men's scores were similar on different scales, with the highest score on the Intimacy scale (the need to build relations based on closeness, trust, and openness and willingness to work on the relationship) and the lowest score on the Self-Fulfillment scale (the possibility of fulfilling oneself, one's goals, and one's system of values). In the case of women, the score was the highest on the Similarity scale (similar views on the development of the relationship, similar values and goals) and the lowest on the Disappointment scale.

The results summarized in Table 7 indicate that spouses residing in rural areas report a slightly higher level of marital satisfaction compared to those living in urban areas. Minor differences between the groups were observed in the overall score as well as in the self-fulfillment and disappointment subscales – where spouses from urban areas scored higher. However, these differences are not statistically significant.

Male respondents' scores on the scales measuring marital satisfaction were slightly higher in the subgroup living in rural settings, but the differences between the groups turned out to be statistically non-significant (Table 8).

Table 6. Differences between male and female subgroups in terms of marital satisfaction

KDM-2 scale	Total sample				Men				Women					
	raw scores		sten scores		raw scores		sten scores		raw scores		sten scores			
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	U	p
Intimacy	30.7	6.33	5.58	2.2	30.6	6.49	5.57	2.3	30.7	6.17	5.6	2.09	8540	0.947
Self-fulfillment	27.3	4.37	5.32	1.81	27.3	4.45	5.29	1.98	27.2	4.29	5.35	1.62	8554	0.965
Similarity	27.1	5.27	5.66	2.22	27.0	5.48	5.54	2.24	27.2	5.05	5.77	2.19	8609	0.963
Disappointment	22.5	9.21	5.3	2.29	22.3	8.99	5.55	2.35	22.7	9.43	5.32	2.32	8736	0.800
Total score	122.58	21.6	5.46	2.13	122.74	21.88	5.48	2.21	122.42	21.38	5.51	2.05	8534	0.940

Legend: U – Mann-Whitney U test; p – significance level; M – arithmetic mean; SD – standard deviation.

Slight differences between wives living in rural and urban settings were found in scores on the Self-fulfillment and Disappointment scales. Women from towns and cities reported a lower level of marital self-fulfillment and a higher level of marital disappointment – indicating a stronger sense that marriage limited their freedom and autonomy. However, these differences are not statistically significant (Table 9).

Table 7. Differences in marital satisfaction between subgroups of participants residing in rural and urban areas

KDM-2 scale	Spouses from rural settings				Spouses from urban settings					
	raw scores		sten scores		raw scores		sten scores			
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	U	p
Intimacy	30.93	5.42	5.59	1.98	30.35	7.12	5.57	2.40	8699	0.843
Self-fulfillment	27.71	3.66	5.34	1.61	26.82	4.96	5.29	2.00	8077	0.411
Similarity	27.46	4.29	5.72	1.93	26.69	6.09	5.59	2.47	8408	0.780
Disappointment	21.43	7.85	5.38	2.08	23.66	10.30	5.49	2.42	9262	0.264
Total score	124.75	18.10	5.51	1.9	120.34	24.56	5.48	2.32	8078	0.414

Legend: U – Mann-Whitney U test; p – significance level; M – arithmetic mean; SD – standard deviation.

Table 8. Differences in marital satisfaction between subgroups of men residing in rural and urban areas

KDM-2 scale	Men from rural settings				Men from urban settings					
	raw scores		sten scores		raw scores		sten scores			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	U	*p*
Intimacy	31.07	5.61	5.58	2.13	30.20	7.26	5.56	2.46	2131	0.950
Self-fulfillment	27.68	3.66	5.32	1.77	26.98	5.12	5.25	2.18	2111	0.877
Similarity	27.67	4.39	5.73	2.05	26.29	6.35	5.34	2.39	1948	0.365
Disappointment	21.38	7.69	5.48	2.04	23.29	10.07	5.62	2.31	2261	0.591
Total score	125.27	18.05	5.53	1.99	120.09	25.01	5.44	2.34	1975	0.435

Legend: U – Mann-Whitney U test; p – significance level; M – arithmetic mean; SD – standard deviation.

Table 9. Differences in marital satisfaction between subgroups of women residing in rural and urban areas

KDM-2 scale	Women from rural settings				Women from urban settings					
	raw scores		sten scores		raw scores		sten scores			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	U	*p*
Intimacy	30.80	5.22	5.61	1.82	30.51	6.99	5.58	2.34	2218	0.738
Self-fulfillment	27.73	3.66	5.36	1.42	26.66	4.78	5.34	1.81	1921	0.300
Similarity	27.26	4.17	5.71	1.79	27.08	5.81	5.83	2.53	2259	0.600
Disappointment	21.48	8.02	5.27	2.11	24.01	10.51	5.36	2.52	2372	0.296
Total score	124.23	18.14	5.49	1.79	120.58	24.11	5.53	2.30	2072	0.737

Legend: U – Mann-Whitney U test; p – significance level; M – arithmetic mean; SD – standard deviation.

4.3. Relationships between attachment styles and marital satisfaction

To determine the relationships between the variables, we computed *rho-Spearman's* correlation coefficients, both for the total sample and for the groups distinguished according to gender and place of residence (Table 10).

The analysis of correlation coefficients revealed relatively strong and highly significant positive associations of secure spousal attachment style with general marital satisfaction and with intimacy and similarity scores, its weaker positive association with the self-fulfillment score, and its negative association with disappointment score (the more secure the spousal attachment, the lower the marital disappointment). Also the avoidant style was significantly negatively correlated with marital satisfaction total score and with the scores on intimacy, similarity, and self-fulfillment as well as positively correlated with disappointment score. Weaker associations were found in the case of anxious-ambivalent style: with overall marital satisfaction and intimacy and similarity scores (positive) and with disappointment (negative).

In the male group, we found significant correlations of secure and avoidant spousal attachment styles with marital satisfaction scales and overall score on that satisfaction (Table 11). The strongest correlations were those of secure style with overall marital satisfaction score ($\rho = .661; p < .001$) and with intimacy score ($\rho = .616, p < .001$). These correlations were positive, which means the more secure the spousal attachment, the higher the general marital satisfaction and the sense of intimacy in marriage. We also found a negative correlation between secure style and disappointment (the more secure the spousal attachment, the less disappointment there was with the marital relationship). Also avoidant style correlated with disappointment, but in this case the correlation was positive ($\rho = .623, p < .001$). The remaining correlations of that style with marital satisfaction scales were negative: the higher the avoidance score, the lower the scores on the Intimacy, Similarity, and Self-fulfillment scales and the lower the overall level of marital satisfaction. Only two weak correlations were found in the case of anxious-ambivalent style – a positive correlation with disappointment score and a negative correlation with marital satisfaction overall score.

Table 10. Correlations between attachment styles and marital satisfaction scales for the total sample

Attachment style	KDM-2 scale				
	Intimacy	Self-fulfillment	Similarity	Disappointment	Total score
Secure	0.665***	0.377***	0.575***	-0.539***	0.676***
Anxious-ambivalent	-0.219**	-0.032	-0.183*	0.352**	-0.208*
Avoidant	-0.498***	-0.217**	-0.415***	0.634***	-0.551***

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 11. Correlations between attachment styles and marital satisfaction scales in male and female subgroups

Scale	Men					Women				
	I	S	P	R	WO	I	S	P	R	WO
SB	0.616***	0.392***	0.534***	-0.634***	0.616***	0.679***	0.282***	0.564***	-0.631***	0.658***
SLA	-0.270**	-0.026	-0.263**	0.289***	-0.270**	-0.310***	-0.032	-0.257**	0.356***	-0.289***
SU	-0.527***	-0.311***	-0.470***	0.623***	-0.527***	-0.606***	-0.232**	-0.489***	0.618***	-0.612***

Legend: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001; SB – secure attachment style; SLA – anxious-ambivalent attachment style; SU – avoidant attachment style; I – intimacy; S – self-fulfillment; P – similarity; R – disappointment; WO – overall marital satisfaction score.

Table 12. Correlation coefficients between attachment styles and marital satisfaction scales in subgroups of participants residing in rural and urban areas

Scale	Participants residing in rural areas					Participants residing in urban areas				
	I	S	P	R	WO	I	S	P	R	WO
SB	0.575***	0.331***	0.494***	-0.593***	0.617***	0.704***	0.342***	0.586**	-0.632***	0.682***
SLA	-0.223*	0.029	-0.190*	0.322***	-0.261**	-0.323***	-0.055	-0.289***	0.322***	-0.294***
SU	-0.548***	-0.238**	-0.436***	0.641***	-0.614***	-0.594***	-0.298***	-0.516***	0.594***	-0.636***

Legend: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001; SB – secure attachment style; SLA – anxious-ambivalent attachment style; SU – avoidant attachment style; I – intimacy; S – self-fulfillment; P – similarity; R – disappointment; WO – overall marital satisfaction score.

In the female group, more significant and strong correlations can be observed between attachment styles and marital satisfaction. As in the case of men, the strongest correlations were found between secure spousal attachment and intimacy score ($\rho = .679$, $p < .001$), overall score ($\rho = .658$, $p < .001$), and disappointment ($\rho = -.631$, $p < .001$) – in the last case, the correlation was negative, indicating an inversely proportional relationship between the variables. The correlation with similarity score was not much weaker. Similar correlation coefficients were observed in the case of avoidant style, which correlated positively with disappointment and negatively with the remaining marital satisfaction scales and with marital satisfaction overall score. Also in the case of anxious-ambivalent style there were weaker but statistically significant associations with intimacy, similarity, and disappointment scores and with marital satisfaction total score.

Among respondents living in rural settings, correlation analysis also revealed relatively strong statistically significant correlations of secure and avoidant styles with marital satisfaction scales and with marital satisfaction overall score. The strongest correlation was found between avoidant style and disappointment ($\rho = .641$, $p < .001$), and it was a positive one, which means the higher the score on avoidance, the higher the level of marital disappointment. There was a relatively strong negative correlation between avoidant style and overall marital satisfaction (the higher the score on avoidant style, the higher the level of marital satisfaction) and a positive correlation between secure style score and overall marital satisfaction. The fewest statistically significant correlations were found between anxious-ambivalent style and marital satisfaction scales – only disappointment was correlated with this style, and in the case of overall marital satisfaction score there was a weak negative correlation.

In the case of respondents living in urban settings, the relationships were the strongest between secure style and intimacy as well as marital satisfaction total score. Significant relationships were also found between all marital satisfaction scales and secure and avoidant styles. Interestingly, in this group, also anxious-ambivalent style showed significant though rather weak correlations with the Intimacy and Similarity scales (negative correlations), with the Disappointment scale (positive correlation), and with marital satisfaction total score (Table 12).

5. Discussion of results

Mother-child attachment styles are a model that is subsequently used in adulthood for all interpersonal relations, including the close ones in marriage. Naturally, the secure, anxious-ambivalent, or avoidant style manifesting itself in relations between spouses is not an exact copy of the childhood pattern of attachment to the caregiver, but it constitutes the foundation and the starting point for adult relationships. It may therefore have a significant impact on the quality of those relationships and the perceived marital satisfaction resulting from their quality. This point of view contributed to the search for associations between attachment styles and martial satisfaction.

The conducted study of married couples did not reveal any differences between men and women, nor between spouses residing in rural and urban areas, in terms of the examined attachment styles or the

specific dimensions of marital satisfaction. Therefore, the hypotheses formulated in the methodological section that predicted such differences were not confirmed. However, the remaining hypotheses regarding the relationships between attachment styles and marital satisfaction – both the overall result and the dimensions of intimacy, self-actualization, similarity, and disappointment – were largely supported.

The collected results indicate that a secure attachment style to one's spouse is associated with a high level of marital satisfaction. In this kind of secure relationship, men and women give each other trust, honesty, and openness. They build an intimate relationship based on love that is worth caring for. Such a style protects spouses against disappointment and behaviors that lead to the breakdown of their marriage – unlike an insecure avoidant style, in the case of which the associations are opposite. The latter style suggests much lower marital satisfaction, limited trust in the partner, incompatibility, conflictive tendencies, and considerable marital disappointment. Moreover, in respondents living in urban settings the secure style primarily builds intimacy between the spouses, whereas in respondents living in the countryside it was the avoidant style that was more significant, being particularly strongly associated with marital disappointment – a sense of failure in life caused by marriage, interpreting marriage as a limitation of autonomy, and avoiding each other. Khaled Bedair, Eid Abo Hamza, and Samuel Gladding (2020) also found a link between secure attachment and marital satisfaction. Similar findings were yielded by research conducted in Asian (Huang et al., 2020), Arab (Amani & Khosroshahi, 2020), Indian (Rosalina et al., 2020), and South American cultures (Costa & Mosmann, 2020).

Interestingly, the results of our study indicate that marital satisfaction shows the weakest correlations with the anxious-ambivalent attachment style. In both the male and female subgroups, as well as among participants residing in rural and urban areas, negative correlations were observed between this attachment style and the overall marital satisfaction score, as well as the intimacy and similarity scales. Additionally, a positive correlation was found between the anxious-ambivalent style and the disappointment scale. However, this attachment style did not show statistically significant associations with the self-fullfilment scale.

The conducted study allows for the conclusion that a secure attachment style displayed by spouses is associated with a higher level of relationship satisfaction, while insecure attachment styles, particularly the avoidant style, are clearly linked to significantly lower satisfaction. The weakest association between marital satisfaction was observed with the anxious-ambivalent attachment style. A similar relationship was established by Hanna Liberska and Dorota Suwalska (2011), who identified secure attachment as the pattern most strongly associated with satisfying relationships.

Summary

Attachment theory continues to serve as a rich source of inspiration for a wide spectrum of research, both developmental and those centered on marriage and family, offering a solid foundation for describing and explaining human functioning and interpersonal relationships, including those within the marital context (Suwalska-Barancewicz, 2016b). The present study, conducted among married couples living in both rural and urban areas, revealed no significant differences between these groups in terms of attachment styles toward one's spouse or overall marital satisfaction. However, the findings clearly demonstrated that specific attachment styles within the marital relationship are significantly correlated with levels of marital satisfaction. The associations between attachment styles and marital satisfaction described in this article require further empirical validation, employing diverse research instruments and involving a broader and more varied sample. In particular, the role of the anxious-ambivalent attachment style as a model for adult marital relationships remains ambiguous, pointing to the necessity of identifying potential mediators of these associations.

In conclusion, it is also important to acknowledge a limitation of the present study related to the use of a self-report instrument, which explicitly refers to attachment categories. Although such tools are widely used, prior research (e.g., Gallo, Smith, & Ruiz,

2003; Stein et al., 2002) suggests that a dimensional approach may offer a more nuanced depiction of adult attachment. Considering this, future research would benefit from incorporating instruments that assess attachment along dimensional scales, thereby enhancing measurement precision and allowing for broader cross-cultural comparisons with studies conducted in other countries.

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