

Communication Patterns and Attachment Styles as Predictors of Relationship Satisfaction in Urban Indian Adults

Bharti Biswas

M. Sc. Psychology (Counselling Psychology), Jain (Deemed to be) University, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

Email: [bhartibiswas1976\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:bhartibiswas1976[at]gmail.com)

Abstract: Communication and attachment security are both known to shape how satisfied people feel in their relationships. How much each contributes, and whether attachment adds anything once communication is accounted for, is less well studied outside Western populations. We surveyed 100 adults (aged 21–45 years) in committed relationships across Mumbai, Kolkata, and New Delhi using a cross-sectional correlational design to examine the relative contributions of communication patterns and attachment security to relationship satisfaction. Participants completed the Communication Patterns Questionnaire, the Experiences in Close Relationships–Revised scale, and the Relationship Assessment Scale. Constructive communication showed a strong positive association with satisfaction ($r = .72, p < .001$), whereas destructive communication patterns were negatively associated with satisfaction ($r = -.58$ to $-.68, p < .001$). Attachment anxiety ($r = -.49$) and attachment avoidance ($r = -.53$) were also inversely related to satisfaction. In hierarchical regression, communication patterns and attachment styles together accounted for 64.0% of the variance in relationship satisfaction, $F(6, 93) = 27.54, p < .001$, and attachment contributed a significant incremental effect beyond communication alone ($\Delta R^2 = .041, p = .007$). These results parallel findings from Western samples and indicate that interventions in Indian collectivist contexts may be most effective when they combine communication-focused strategies with attachment-informed approaches to strengthen both interactional skills and underlying security in close relationships.

Keywords: communication patterns; attachment styles; relationship satisfaction; interpersonal relationships; Indian adults

1. Introduction

Ask people what makes a relationship work, and communication is almost always near the top of the list, and the evidence backs that instinct up. How partners talk to each other, particularly when something has gone wrong, is one of the clearest signals of whether a relationship is thriving or struggling [1]. Couples who listen well and solve problems together tend to report more satisfaction; couples who slide into criticism, contempt, defensiveness or stonewalling are considerably more likely to end up distressed or separated [2]. One especially corrosive pattern is demand–withdraw, in which one partner keeps pushing to talk something through while the other partner disengages or leaves the room [3].

Communication style is only part of the picture, though. Attachment theory offers a second explanation: our early experiences with caregivers shape how comfortable we are, as adults, with closeness and conflict [4], [5]. People who feel secure in relationships tend to communicate openly and navigate disagreements constructively. People who feel anxious about being abandoned, or uneasy about depending on someone else, often fall into communication habits that make conflict worse rather than better [6].

Most of what we know about how communication and attachment shape relationships comes from Western, individualist samples. India's more collectivist, family-centred culture (with joint family involvement in relationships, defined gender roles and a general cultural preference for emotional restraint) could plausibly change how these patterns play out [7], and indeed, restrained, indirect communication has already been linked to lower marital satisfaction among urban Indian couples [8]. Yet few studies

have examined communication and attachment together in Indian couples using standardised, validated measures. This study was designed to address that gap.

2. Literature Survey

Decades of longitudinal and meta-analytic research place communication quality among the most consistent predictors of relationship satisfaction and stability, typically accounting for 40 to 60% of the variation researchers observe across different relationship stages [9], [10]. Attachment security adds a complementary piece. People who are secure tend to feel more at ease with intimacy and handle conflict more constructively, while insecure attachment is tied to communication habits that gradually wear down trust [6]. Within India specifically, restrained emotional expression and family-mediated decision-making have been shown to reduce how directly couples communicate with each other [8], and researchers have explicitly flagged the shortage of standardised, quantitative work combining communication and attachment constructs in Indian samples as a real gap in the literature [7].

3. Problem Definition

Western research consistently shows that communication patterns and attachment styles shape relationship satisfaction, but we still know little about how well this holds in India's sociocultural context, or whether attachment adds anything once communication style is already accounted for. This study asks two linked questions: (i) to what extent do communication patterns (constructive and destructive) and attachment styles (anxiety and avoidance) predict relationship satisfaction among adults in committed relationships in urban

India, and (ii) does attachment style contribute additional predictive value once communication patterns are already in the model?

Our objectives were to describe constructive and destructive communication patterns and attachment orientations in the sample; to examine how communication patterns, attachment styles and relationship satisfaction relate to one another; and to determine how much of the variation in relationship satisfaction is jointly and independently explained by communication patterns and attachment styles.

4. Methodology / Approach

4.1 Design and Participants

We used a cross-sectional correlational design. In practice, this meant we measured everyone once and looked at how the variables related to each other, rather than tracking anyone over time or manipulating anything experimentally. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, with a limited snowball element (early participants referred others who were eligible). The final sample was 100 adults (M age = 31.2 years, SD = 5.8) in committed relationships, whether dating, cohabiting or married, of at least one year's standing, living in Mumbai, Kolkata and New Delhi: 48% male, 46% female and 6% non-binary/other; 44% married, 38% dating and 18% cohabiting. We excluded anyone with a severe psychiatric diagnosis, anyone currently in couples therapy and anyone separated, divorced or widowed. The study was approved by the university's ethics committee, and everyone gave written informed consent before taking part.

4.2 Measures

We used three established, previously validated questionnaires rather than anything invented for this study. The Communication Patterns Questionnaire ^[11] is a 35-item scale that asks people how they and their partner typically behave during a disagreement, and sorts responses into a Constructive Communication style plus three destructive styles: Demand-Withdraw, Avoidance/Withdrawal and Negative/Escalated Communication (reliability $\alpha = .70$ to $.85$). The Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised scale ^[12] is a 36-item measure of adult attachment, giving separate scores for Attachment Anxiety (worry about a partner's commitment) and Attachment Avoidance (discomfort with closeness or depending on a partner) ($\alpha = .90$ and $.94$). The Relationship Assessment Scale ^[13] is a short, 7-item measure of overall relationship satisfaction ($\alpha = .85$ to $.90$; possible scores 7 to 35).

4.3 Procedure and Analysis

Participants completed the full battery, plus a short demographic questionnaire, through a secure online form that took roughly 25 to 30 minutes. No one exceeded our cut-off for missing data, so all 100 recruited participants were retained in the final sample. We analysed the data in IBM SPSS Statistics v25, starting with descriptive statistics, then Pearson correlations (a measure, ranging from -1 to +1, of how strongly two variables move together), and finally a hierarchical multiple regression. This last method estimates how much each factor contributes to predicting an outcome once the other factors are held constant. Communication subscales were entered first, with attachment subscales added afterward, so we could see whether attachment explained anything communication alone did not. We checked the standard statistical assumptions (normal residuals, consistent variance, no excessive overlap between predictors) before interpreting the results.

5. Results and Discussion

What makes people feel satisfied in a relationship: how partners talk to each other, or how secure they feel with closeness in general? 100 adults in committed relationships in Mumbai, Kolkata and New Delhi were asked about both. People who described their conversations as calm and collaborative reported the highest relationship satisfaction by a wide margin. People whose arguments tended to turn hostile, or who fell into a pattern where one partner pushes to talk while the other shuts down, reported lower satisfaction. Feeling anxious about a partner's commitment, or uncomfortable relying on a partner at all, was also linked to lower satisfaction, and this held true even after we accounted for how couples communicated. Together, communication style and this sense of security explained roughly two-thirds of the differences in satisfaction we observed, suggesting that couples support in India may benefit from addressing both how partners talk and the deeper trust issues behind the talking.

On average, participants reported communicating constructively more often than destructively (Constructive M = 3.81, SD = 0.62, on a 1–5 scale, versus Demand-Withdraw M = 2.64, Avoidance M = 2.48, and Negative/Escalated M = 2.21). Attachment anxiety (M = 3.42, SD = 1.08) and avoidance (M = 3.18, SD = 1.02) both sat close to the midpoint of the 1–7 scale, suggesting a fairly even mix of secure and insecure participants. Mean relationship satisfaction was 24.73 (SD = 5.41, out of a possible 7–35), indicating moderate-to-high satisfaction across the sample overall.

Table 1: Pearson Correlations Among Study Variables (N = 100)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	RAS
1. Constructive Comm.	–					.72***
2. Demand-Withdraw	-.56***	–				-.62***
3. Avoidance/Withdrawal	-.49***	.61***	–			-.58***
4. Negative/Escalated	-.63***	.71***	.58***	–		-.68***
5. Attach. Anxiety	-.47***	.54***	.42***	.59***	–	-.49***
6. Attach. Avoidance	-.52***	.48***	.67***	.51***	.44***	-.53***

Note. RAS = Relationship Assessment Scale total score. *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

The clearest single finding was that constructive communication tracked closely with relationship satisfaction ($r = .72$, $p < .001$). This was the strongest association anywhere in the dataset. All three destructive communication styles moved in the opposite direction, most strongly Negative/Escalated Communication ($r = -.68$), followed by Demand-Withdraw ($r = -.62$) and Avoidance/Withdrawal ($r = -.58$). Both attachment dimensions were also negatively linked to satisfaction (Anxiety, $r = -.49$; Avoidance, $r = -.53$). Insecure attachment, in turn, was tied to less constructive and more destructive communication, most strikingly between Attachment Avoidance and communicative Avoidance/Withdrawal ($r = .67$). This fits with a simple intuition: people who are uneasy with closeness in general also tend to withdraw during conflict specifically [14].

Table 2: ANOVA for the Full Regression Model

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Regression	1763.47	6	293.91	27.54*
Residual	990.15	93	10.65*	
Total	2753.62	99		

Note. *Recalculated from the reported sums of squares; see accompanying corrections memo. Regression MS = 293.91.

The regression results tell a similar story in more detail. Communication patterns alone (Model 1) accounted for 59.9% of the variation in relationship satisfaction ($R^2 = .599$, $F(4, 95) = 35.49$, $p < .001$), already a substantial share. Adding attachment variables (Model 2) pushed explained variance to 64.0% ($R^2 = .640$, Adjusted $R^2 = .617$), a further 4.1% ($\Delta R^2 = .041$, $\Delta F(2, 93) = 5.30$, $p = .007$) that communication alone did not capture. The full model, combining both sets of predictors, was strongly significant: $F(6, 93) = 27.54$, $p < .001$.

Table 3: Regression Coefficients Predicting Relationship Satisfaction (Full Model)

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	19.42	2.18	N/A	8.91	<.001
Constructive Comm.	3.84	0.52	0.47	7.38	<.001
Demand-Withdraw	-2.11	0.48	-.27	-4.40	<.001
Avoidance/Withdrawal	-1.73	0.51	-.21	-3.39	0.001
Negative/Escalated	-2.46	0.45	-.33	-5.47	<.001
Attachment Anxiety	-0.84	0.31	-.17	-2.71	0.008
Attachment Avoidance	-1.12	0.34	-.21	-3.29	0.001

Note. Dependent variable: RAS total score. $R^2 = .640$, Adjusted $R^2 = .617$, $F(6, 93) = 27.54$, $p < .001$.

Constructive communication was by far the strongest individual predictor ($\beta = .47$, $p < .001$). The standardised beta here means that, compared to every other factor in the model, constructive communication moved the needle on satisfaction the most. Negative/Escalated Communication was the strongest negative predictor ($\beta = -.33$), followed by Demand-Withdraw ($\beta = -.27$), Attachment Avoidance ($\beta = -.21$), Avoidance/Withdrawal ($\beta = -.21$), and Attachment Anxiety ($\beta = -.17$), all statistically reliable at $p \leq .008$. These results line up with earlier Western findings that constructive communication is the dominant predictor of satisfaction [9], [10], and extend that pattern to an urban Indian sample. The fact that attachment added explanatory power beyond communication ($\Delta R^2 = .041$) tells us that communication and attachment are picking up on somewhat different things, each carrying its own predictive weight. What it does not tell us,

and what we want to state plainly, is whether communication is the mechanism through which attachment affects satisfaction. Testing that would require a formal mediation analysis, which this cross-sectional design does not include, so we make no such claim here.

Attachment avoidance stood out in two ways: its link to lower satisfaction and its especially strong tie to avoidant communication ($r = .67$). Both fit with prior evidence that emotionally suppressing and distancing oneself may be particularly damaging to sustained closeness [14]. Clinically, this suggests avoidant attachment may need to be addressed directly in therapy, rather than assuming communication-skills training alone will resolve it. It is also worth noting that 59% of our sample (24% anxious, 21% avoidant, 14% fearful/disorganised, by median-split classification) showed an insecure attachment orientation, despite the sample being urban and well-educated. This is a reminder that insecure attachment and difficult communication patterns are common even among Indians with considerable exposure to more globalised relationship norms. Cultural habits that favour emotional restraint and defer to family involvement in decision-making may make avoidant communication feel normal or expected [8], which could make couples less likely to see it as a problem worth addressing. This is something couples counsellors working in this context may need to name explicitly rather than assume clients will recognise on their own.

6. Conclusion

Communication patterns and attachment styles together accounted for 64.0% of the differences we observed in relationship satisfaction among urban Indian adults. Constructive communication was the single strongest predictor, and attachment avoidance added meaningful predictive power on top of communication alone. These results largely echo Western relational theory within an Indian cultural setting, and support the idea that couples counselling and preventive mental-health programming in India would benefit from addressing both communication skills and deeper attachment-related patterns of trust and security, rather than treating either in isolation.

7. Future Scope

A few limitations are worth keeping in mind when interpreting these results. The cross-sectional design means we cannot establish cause and effect: we know these variables are related, not which one drives the other. Our data came entirely from individual self-report rather than direct observation or a partner's perspective, and the sample was limited to educated, urban adults in Mumbai, Kolkata and New Delhi, which may not generalise to rural or less-educated populations. We also did not test formal mediation. That is, we did not statistically test whether communication patterns explain the pathway through which attachment affects satisfaction, and we consider this an important next step, alongside longitudinal and dyadic (both-partners) designs, tests of cultural moderators such as gender-role attitudes and the development of communication and attachment measures adapted specifically for the Indian context.

Ethical Statement

This study was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee, JAIN (Deemed-to-be) University. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants. The author declares no conflict of interest and no external funding for this research.

References

- [1] Gottman JM, Silver N. The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work. New York: Crown Publishers; 1999.
- [2] Gottman JM. What Predicts Divorce? The Relationship Between Marital Processes and Marital Outcomes. Hillsdale (NJ): Lawrence Erlbaum Associates; 1994.
- [3] Christensen A, Heavey CL. Gender and social structure in the demand/withdraw pattern of marital conflict. *J Pers Soc Psychol.* 1990;59(1):73-81.
- [4] Bowlby J. Attachment and Loss: Vol. 1. Attachment. New York: Basic Books; 1969.
- [5] Hazan C, Shaver PR. Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process. *J Pers Soc Psychol.* 1987;52(3):511-24.
- [6] Mikulincer M, Shaver PR. Attachment in Adulthood: Structure, Dynamics, and Change. New York: Guilford Press; 2007.
- [7] Sinha JBP, Verma J. Social Psychology in India: Concepts, Contexts, and Applications. New Delhi: Sage Publications; 2013.
- [8] Prakash A, Copur Z. Communication styles and marital satisfaction among Indian couples. *J Fam Stud.* 2018;24(3):287-301.
- [9] Karney BR, Bradbury TN. The longitudinal course of marital quality and stability: a review of theory, methods, and research. *Psychol Bull.* 1995;118(1):3-34.
- [10] Bradbury TN, Fincham FD, Beach SRH. Research on the nature and determinants of marital satisfaction: a decade in review. *J Marriage Fam.* 2000;62(4):964-80.
- [11] Christensen A, Sullaway M. Communication Patterns Questionnaire. Los Angeles: University of California; 1984.
- [12] Fraley RC, Waller NG, Brennan KA. An item response theory analysis of self-report measures of adult attachment. *J Pers Soc Psychol.* 2000;78(2):350-65.
- [13] Hendrick SS. A generic measure of relationship satisfaction. *J Marriage Fam.* 1988;50(1):93-8.
- [14] Feeney JA. Adult attachment, emotional control, and marital satisfaction. *Pers Relatsh.* 1999;6(2):169-83.