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Religious commitment, attachment styles, and Attitude towards Infidelity among Young Adults in India

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Abstract

This study investigates the interplay between attachment styles and religious commitment in influencing attitudes toward infidelity among young adults in India. Employing a quantitative research design, data were gathered from 196 participants aged 18-25 through online surveys. Measures included the Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS), Religious Commitment Inventory- 10, and Attitude Towards Infidelity Scale. The findings revealed no significant correlation between attachment styles or religious commitment and attitudes toward infidelity. These findings suggest that cultural and societal norms may have a stronger influence on attitude towards fidelity or infidelity in India, than individual attachment styles or religious factors. A notable finding was that individuals with anxious attachment showed a slight positive association with religious commitment, possibly seeking emotional support through religion. This study highlights the significance and importance of culturally sensitive approaches in understanding relationship dynamics within the Indian context.

Keywords: Infidelity; Attachment styles; Religious commitment; Young adults; Attitudes towards infidelity

1. Introduction

Romantic relationships play a significant role in shaping emotional and mental well-being, with trust and fidelity being crucial components [1]. Infidelity, defined as a breach of exclusivity in romantic relationships, is a complex phenomenon influenced by psychological, cultural, and social factors, including attachment styles and religious commitment [2], [3]. While Western literature has extensively examined predictors of infidelity, such as personality traits, commitment levels, and relationship satisfaction [4], research in the Indian context remains limited. Given India's rich cultural diversities, strong religious foundations, and transforming relationship norms, it is essential to explore factors like attachment styles and religious commitment in shaping attitudes toward infidelity.

Attachment theory, proposed by Bowlby (1969), emphasizes the role of early caregiver interactions in shaping individuals' attachment styles, which subsequently influence their behaviours and relationships throughout life [5]. Secure attachment is associated with greater relationship stability, while insecure attachment styles, such as avoidant and anxious attachments, are associated with higher rates of infidelity [6]. Avoidant individuals may seek alternative partners due to discomfort with intimacy, while anxious individuals are less prone to engaging in infidelity due to their fear of abandonment [5], [6].

Religious commitment has been recognized as a potential preventative factor against infidelity, as religious beliefs often emphasize marital fidelity and moral accountability [3]. Studies indicate that individuals with higher religious commitment are less likely to engage in infidelity due to internalized moral values [3], [7]. However, cultural variations affect the extent of this influence, and in some cases, religious commitment may moderate the effects of attachment insecurity, reinforcing fidelity in relationships [8], [9].

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Research on infidelity highlights its complex nature, consisting of sexual, emotional, and online dimensions [10]. Studies suggest that infidelity can stem from personal traits, relationship dissatisfaction, and external influences such as digital connectivity [11], [12]. Attachment styles significantly impact fidelity behaviours, with insecure attachments often linked to increased likelihood of infidelity [6], [13].

Religious commitment is frequently associated with marital fidelity, with research indicating that high religiously committed individuals report lower rates of infidelity [14], [15]. However, findings vary across cultural contexts. Some studies suggest that religiosity strengthens commitment and relationship satisfaction, while others indicate that it does not entirely deter infidelity, posing mixed results on the association between the two variables [3], [11], [14]. Furthermore, religious commitment may serve as a compensatory mechanism for individuals with insecure attachment styles, particularly those with anxious attachment style. [16], [17].

Despite these findings, limited research explores the combined effects of attachment styles and religious commitment on attitudes toward infidelity, particularly in the Indian context. Given India's unique socio-cultural foundations, where religious beliefs and practices are deeply integrated with social norms, understanding these dynamics can provide valuable insights into relationship stability and fidelity within this population [18].

1.1. Aims and Objective of the Study

The study aims to explore the relationship between religious commitment attachment styles and attitude towards infidelity among young adults in India.

- To analyse the relationship between attachment styles and attitude towards infidelity among young adults in India.
- To investigate the relationship between religious commitment and attitude towards infidelity among young adults.
- To investigate variation in attitudes towards infidelity and religious commitment across the four attachment styles.
- To identify any potential gender differences in religious commitment and infidelity among the young adults of India.

1.2. Research Hypotheses

- H1: There is a significant relationship between various attachment styles and attitude towards infidelity among young adults in India.
- H2: Higher levels of religious commitment is correlated with lower levels of infidelity among young adults in India.
- H3: Religious commitment and attitude towards infidelity varies across the different attachment styles.
- H4: There are significant gender differences in religious commitment and attitude towards infidelity.

1.3. Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is that it provides insights into the cultural and psychological factors shaping relationship fidelity, addressing a gap in non-Western literature. Findings can inform culturally relevant counselling strategies, helping mental health professionals develop interventions to promote relationship stability. Additionally, this research lays the groundwork for future studies exploring sociocultural and psychological influences on romantic relationships in India.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Research design

A quantitative approach was used to investigate the relationship between attachment styles, religious commitment and attitude towards infidelity.

2.2. Participants

Participants for this study includes young adults between the age range of 18-25 from India who are currently or previously have been in a monogamous romantic relationship for at least six months. The sample includes individuals

of all genders, belonging to any sexual orientation and participants must not be currently undergoing treatment for severe psychological conditions.

2.3. Sampling

2.3.1. Technique Used

Purposive sampling was employed to recruit individuals fitting the study's inclusion criteria.

2.3.2. Inclusion Criteria

- Young adults aged 18-25.
- Participants residing in India.
- Individuals currently or previously in a monogamous romantic relationship for at least six months.
- Married and engaged individuals were included without any restriction to the duration of their relationship

2.3.3. Exclusion Criteria

- Those who have never been in a monogamous romantic relationship.
- Individuals with cognitive impairments that may affect comprehension.

2.4. Tools

2.4.1. Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS)

The Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS) developed by Collins (1996) is used to measure adult attachment styles. The scale consists of eighteen items divided into three subscales: Close - Measures comfort with closeness and intimacy. Depend - Measures the degree to which a person feels they can depend on others. Anxiety - Measures anxiety about being abandoned or unloved. Each item is scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all characteristic) to 5 (very characteristic) [19].

2.4.2. Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (RCI-10)

Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (RCI-10) is a 10-item scale designed to measure a person's level of religious commitment. The items assess both interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of religious commitment and are scored on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (not at all true of me) to 5 (totally true of me). Scoring and Interpretation: Sum the scores of all 10 items to get a total score. Total scores range from 10 to 50. Higher scores indicate a greater level of religious commitment [20].

2.4.3. Attitude Towards Infidelity Scale

Attitude Towards Infidelity Scale developed by Mark Whatley is a 12-item scale and is used to determine individuals' attitudes towards infidelity. This scale had a good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha=0.71 and test-retest=0.87). The scale includes multiple items that address different dimensions of infidelity, such as emotional, physical, and behavioural aspects. Every item is scored on a Likert scale, usually from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). For scoring and interpretation, add the scores of all items to get a total score. Higher scores indicate a more permissive attitude towards infidelity, while lower scores indicate a more negative attitude towards infidelity [21].

2.5. Procedure

Participants were selected through online platforms and personal outreach. Data collection was conducted via Google Forms, through an online survey consisting of demographic questions and the three standardized measures. Basic screening ensured compliance with inclusion criteria. Data was coded using Microsoft Excel and analysed using SPSS software and appropriate statistical methods to explore the relationship among the three variables.

2.6. Data Analysis

2.6.1. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to determine participant demographics, including age, gender, and relationship status.

2.6.2. Inferential Statistics

Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to assess the relationships between attachment styles, religious commitment, and attitudes toward infidelity. ANOVA and t-tests were utilized to identify significant group differences.

3. Results and discussion

The data was gathered with the help of Google forms from 196 young adults from India, between 18 and 25 years old and analyzed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS 25.

Table 1 Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants

Sample Characteristics	n	% / <i>M, SD</i>
Gender		
Male	72	36.7%
Female	124	63.3%
Religion		
Muslim	95	48.5%
Christian	33	16.8%
Hindu	61	31.1%
Buddhist	1	0.5%
Jain	2	1%
Sikh	1	0.5%
Atheist	3	1.5%
Nature of Relationship		
Romantic	91	46.4%
Serious/Committed	105	53.6%
Duration of Relationship		
6-12 months	69	35.2%
> 12 months	105	53.6%
Engaged/Married (No time Constraint)	22	11.2%
Age	196	21.7, 2.0

Note. N = 196

Table 1 shows the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample. The sample size for this study was 196 with an age range of young adults (18-25 years) and a mean age of 21.7 years with a standard deviation of 2.0. Gender distribution shows that 124 participants were female (63.3%) and 72 were male (36.7%). Most of the participants were predominantly Muslims with 48.5% of the sample, followed by Hindus with 31.1% and Christians at 16.8%. Other religious orientation of the participant included a small proportion of Atheist (1.5%), Jain (1%), Buddhist and Sikh with 0.5% of the sample. A slight majority of the sample described the nature of their relationship as serious/committed with 53.6% (n=105) of the sample size and the remaining 46.4% (n=91) were in a romantic relationship. Majority of the participants duration of relationship was over 12 months (53.6%, n=105), followed by 6-12 months of duration (35.2%, n=69) and 11.2% who were either married or engaged without a specific time constraint.

According to the Central Limit Theorem, when a random sample of size $n > 30$ is drawn from an infinite population, the sample mean approximates a normal distribution. Since this study has a sample size of 196, which exceeds 30, a parametric test will be used to assess the correlation between variables.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

Variables	n	M	SD	1	2	3	4
Total Infidelity	196	28.52	13.20		0.088	0.055	0.104
Total RCI	196	31.20	10.86	0.088			
Anxiety	196	2.90	0.95	0.055	0.146*		
Avoid	196	33.99	4.88	0.104	0.028		

Note. * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Table 2 shows the correlation analysis of Avoidance, Anxiety, with Attitudes towards Infidelity (Total Infidelity) and Religious Commitment (Total RCI) indicates that the correlations between Total Infidelity and these variables are not significant, suggesting that attachment styles and religious commitment may not strongly correlated to attitudes toward infidelity in this specific sample. Specifically, correlations between Total Infidelity and Avoidance and between Total Infidelity and Anxiety have p-values >0.05, underscoring the lack of a meaningful association. These results contradict some previous research that shows an association between insecure attachment styles with higher likelihood of infidelity [13]. This suggests that there may be other factors that have a stronger influence on attitudes towards infidelity in the Indian context, such as cultural and societal norms which is in line with a study that implies that cultural factors could mediate relationship between attachment styles and infidelity [22].

Table 2 also indicates that there is no significant relationship between religious commitment and attitude towards infidelity as the p-value is more than 0.05. This suggests that there is no meaningful association between the two variables within this sample. The lack of association between the two variables in this study is in contrast with previous studies which indicates that higher levels of religious commitment acts as a protective factor against infidelity [3]. However, significant variance in the impact of religiosity on infidelity have been highlighted in other previous studies which is in line with the results of this study, suggesting that religious commitment may not always be sufficient to negate infidelity or attitudes towards infidelity across different demographic or cultural groups [11].

The analysis also reveals a statistically significant weak positive correlation between Anxiety and Religious Commitment ($r = 0.146$, $p = 0.042$), suggesting that individuals with higher attachment anxiety may report slightly higher levels of religious commitment. Although the correlation is weak, this association could suggest that individuals with anxious attachment styles may turn to religion as a source of emotional support or stability. This finding is consistent with the compensation hypothesis in attachment theory which suggests that individuals with insecure attachment styles tend to seek comfort in religious frameworks in order to compensate for lack of attachment security in close relationships and negative caregiver experiences [16].

Table 3 ANOVA for Religious Commitment and Attitude towards Infidelity across Attachment styles

Measure	Secure		Preoccupied		Dismissive		Fearful		F	p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Total RCI	28.16	11.19	32.21	9.939	33.11	11.22	33.07	10.19	2.917	0.035
Total Infidelity	27.70	12.63	31.00	12.65	28.94	13.56	27.77	14.08	0.559	0.643

Table 3 shows the results of one-way ANOVA for Total Infidelity wherein the F value of 0.55 and p value of .643 indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between attitudes towards infidelity based on the four attachment styles- secure, preoccupied, dismissive and fearful. This explains the contrary nature of existing literature regarding the two variables, wherein, some previous research indicates that insecure attachment styles, specifically anxious attachment, may be associated with lower infidelity and higher marital satisfaction [15]. This may be indicative that individuals with anxious attachment styles view infidelity as a threat to the security of their relationship and thus are likely to have negative attitudes and less inclination to infidelity related behaviours [5]. However, there have been previous studies which imply that individuals with insecure attachment styles, especially those with avoidant and anxious attachment styles tend to be more inclined to infidelity related behaviours [13].

However, the p-value of .035 for attachment styles and religious commitment which is <0.05 also reveals that there is a statistically significant difference in religious commitment based on attachment styles. This suggests that attachment

styles may have an influence on various levels of religious commitment. The finding here is consistent with the compensation hypothesis, which posits that individuals with insecure attachment may turn to religion for emotional security. Those with anxious attachment styles may seek solace in religious values, viewing faith as a stabilizing force in their relationships. This aligns with prior studies suggesting that individuals with heightened emotional insecurity may be more likely to rely on structured belief systems to establish a sense of predictability and reassurance in their personal lives [16].

Table 4 Gender differences in Religious Commitment and Attitude towards Infidelity

Measure	Male		Female		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Total RCI	32.9	10.7	30.2	10.9	1.71	0.089	0.253
Total Infidelity	30.9	13.1	27.1	13.1	1.97	0.050	0.295

Table 4 shows the Independent Samples t-test for Gender Differences. The t-test result shows $t = 1.97$ with $p = 0.050$. This p-value is exactly at the threshold of 0.05, indicating borderline significance. There is a marginally significant difference in attitudes towards infidelity between males and females. Previous studies on the other hand show a significant gender difference in attitude towards infidelity, with men exhibiting a more permissive attitudes towards infidelity [10], [18]. T-test results for religious commitment, indicates that difference in religious commitment between genders is not statistically significant, consistent with some studies that found minimal gender differences in religious commitment within culturally homogeneous samples [14].

T-test results for religious commitment, whereon p-value is .089 suggests that the difference in religious commitment between genders is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

The lack of significant correlation between attachment styles and infidelity suggests that additional factors, such as personality traits, relationship satisfaction, or exposure to infidelity in close relationships, may be stronger predictors of infidelity-related attitudes. Future studies should incorporate these variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing attitudes toward infidelity in India.

4. Conclusion

The study aimed at exploring the relationship between the three variables of attachment styles, religious commitment, and attitudes towards infidelity among young adults in India. Findings revealed that there was no statistically significant association between attachment styles and attitudes toward infidelity, suggesting that other factors such as cultural and societal norms might have a higher influence on attitudes towards infidelity in the Indian context. Additionally, religious commitment did not significantly correlate with attitudes towards infidelity, differing from past studies where higher religious commitment served as a protective factor, typically reduced infidelity. A positive correlation was found between anxious attachment and religious commitment, aligning with the compensation hypothesis, indicating that individuals with anxious attachment may turn to religion for emotional support. Differences in religious commitment based on attachment styles were statistically significant, suggesting that attachment styles may have an influence on various levels of religious commitment.

The lack of association between attachment styles and religious commitment with attitudes towards infidelity could be indicative of the influence of cultural and societal norms in shaping relationships in the Indian context. This suggest that therapeutic approaches should prioritize cultural and societal facts when addressing relationship dynamics. Broader cultural values pertaining to marriage, fidelity and relationship dynamics should be focused on by practitioners in dealing with concerns related to relationship dynamics in India.

Given the association between anxious attachment and religious commitment, therapeutic interventions can integrate religious beliefs into therapy to help clients develop security. Practitioners should consider how religious commitment and beliefs interact with clients' attachment needs, especially for those who may turn to religion to manage attachment-related anxiety.

The study relies on self-report measures which could introduce social desirability bias, especially related to sensitive topics of infidelity and religiosity. Participants may have altered their responses to align with socially acceptable norms,

given the cultural and moral connotations surrounding the subject of infidelity. Although the questionnaire was carefully designed, it is difficult to assess the full honesty of the participants' responses. The study does not take into account how the relationship between variables might change overtime as they likely evolve across different stages of life and relationships. While the study gives an insight into the relationship between the three variables of attachment styles, religious commitment and attitudes towards infidelity in the Indian context, a larger sample would have allowed for a more reliable and robust statistical analysis and higher confidence in the results. Establishing meaningful potential relationship between the variables with a small sample is challenging and could mask underlying trends and associations that maybe present with a broader sample. There is a lack of qualitative data that may help capture more nuanced perspective that young adults might hold regarding attachment, religious belief and infidelity. Qualitative data could provide richer insights into cultural attitudes and personal experiences that go beyond quantitative measures.

Future research should expand on these findings by including larger and more diverse samples across different regions, religions, and socioeconomic backgrounds within India to enhance generalizability. Longitudinal studies tracking changes in attachment, religious commitment, and attitudes toward infidelity over time would provide insights into how these factors evolve across relationship stages. Additionally, incorporating variables such as personality traits, family dynamics, and relationship satisfaction could offer a more comprehensive understanding of fidelity-related attitudes. Combining self-report measures with qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, may provide deeper insights, nuance cultural understanding and mitigate social desirability bias by allowing participants to express themselves in a more open format. This could reveal deeper insights into how young adults in India perceive and navigate attachment, religious beliefs, and fidelity.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors have no financial, personal, or professional conflicts of interest related to this study.

Statement of ethical approval

Ethical considerations were prioritized by ensuring informed consent, confidentiality and minimizing harm to participants.

Statement of informed consent

The written consent form was obtained from participants after providing them clear information about the study. Their privacy was protected by maintaining confidentiality and anonymity of the data collected. Cultural sensitivity was considered by adapting methods to be culturally appropriate.

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