

# Depression and attachment: how do personality styles and social support influence this relation?

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to improve the current understanding of the relation between depression and attachment through the evaluation of the role of personality styles (dependent vs self-critical) and social support in this association. These variables were studied in a clinical sample of 70 depressed outpatients (83% women; M=41.47 years, SD=12.91). Depressive symptomatology was assessed through the Beck Depression Inventory, adult attachment through the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale, social support through the Social Support Questionnaire and dependency and self-criticism through the Depressive Experiences Questionnaire. Mediation and moderation regression analyses were performed. Results show that the association between the dimensions of attachment (anxiety and avoidance) and depression was partially mediated by self-criticism. Furthermore, results demonstrate the role of social support as a moderating variable:

when the level of satisfaction with social support was low and the anxiety dimension in the attachment scale was high, as avoidance increased, depressive symptoms increased as well. Results are discussed in relation to their importance for understanding the complex interplay of the variables involved in depression.

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## Introduction

Given that depression is the most commonly occurring, serious, and recurrent mental disorder worldwide (WHO, 2012; Kessler & Bromet, 2013), large amounts of resources have been invested in trying to understand its complexity.

In the search for explanations, the relation between attachment and depression has received special attention. Attachment insecurities -based on negative models of self and others, and both intra- and interpersonal regulatory deficits rooted in discouraging experiences with unavailable, rejecting, or neglectful attachment figures- puts a person at risk for psychological disorders (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Researchers have extended Bowlby's concepts from the infant to the adult relationship domain (e.g. Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). Adult attachment insecurities can be described in terms of two dimensions (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998): i) adult attachment anxiety is defined as the fear of rejection and abandonment. People with anxious attachment tend to develop a negative internal working model of self (Pietromonaco & Barrett, 2000) and perceive less self-efficacy, resulting – in some cases – in psychopathologies such as depressive reactions; ii) adult