

Original Research

Received 18 May 2026

Revised 09 July 2026

Accepted 20 July 2026

Natural Resources for Human Health 2026, Vol.6(13s):1588–1603

KEYWORDS:

Parental Narcissism; Adult Attachment Styles; Disorganized Attachment; Emotional Neglect; Asian Adolescents

Adult Attachment Styles in Students with Narcissistic Parents

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ABSTRACT: This study examined the relationship between perceived parental narcissism, by differentiating between maternal and paternal figures and the subsequent attachment outcomes (anxious, avoidant, and disorganized) experienced during adulthood in the context of adolescents and young adults, especially targeting the populations of Asia and India, which are often understudied in literature. A dual method approach was utilized for this study, combining Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines with qualitative case study analysis. The sources were collected from PubMed/MEDLINE, Web of Science, and Scopus from January 2018 until March 2026. A total of 35 sources were analysed using the PRISMA methodology. Across the literature that was examined, perceived narcissism in either parent was consistently associated with insecure patterns of attachment with emotional neglect, inconsistent caregiving, and conditional appearance arising as the primary psychosocial mechanisms linking parental narcissism to attachment insecurity. In general, paternal narcissism was significantly related to avoidant attachment, while maternal narcissism was related to anxious and disorganized attachment. These results contribute to the literature by taking attachment theory research beyond the anxious-avoidant dimension to focus on disorganized attachment and offering one of the first comprehensive analyses of narcissism in relation to Asian family cultures where collectivism may influence the perception and expression of narcissistic parenting. Furthermore, a model is suggested for screening and referring individuals raised in a narcissistic environment to the appropriate service providers, as well as future research directions.

INTRODUCTION

Individuals possessing characteristics such as entitlement, apathy, an inflated sense of self and a persistent need for admiration are often associated with narcissistic traits. Recently, there has been a notable increase in the prevalence of such traits amongst non-clinical youth populations, this highlights the importance of upbringing, as childhood experiences can play a significant role in contributing to the development of these traits which may subsequently influence adult attachment patterns. Research on insecure attachment, which refers to a behavioral pattern in relationships characterized by distrust and avoidance suggests that its development may be attributed to a lack of a secure base established by parental figures. Furthermore, it displays a positive correlation with narcissistic tendencies. Thereby, early parent child interactions are a key etiological factor in influencing stability within relationships and adult attachment styles (Ahmadi et al., 2013). This can be understood through the concept of a child's "psychological birth" which is largely dependent on the foundation caregivers establish in their early years. It influences the formative development of self-worth, emotional regulation, and expectations in their later relationships. When such interactions are mediated by narcissistic behaviors such as emotional unresponsiveness, control, and lack of validation, the environment is characterized as psychologically inconsistent and vulnerable for the child. As a result of these interactions, which are frequently embedded in disciplinary practices and emotional responses, the formation of secure attachment may be disrupted as well as be causally associated with subsequent behavioral issues. Moreover, the emotional tone, set by a narcissistic caregiver in an early childhood environment also substantially compromises the individual's ability to have a strong sense of autonomy and a secure self-concept (Sharma, 2025). According to Bowlby's theory infants are biologically programmed to build

attachment bonds, the core of his theory suggests that attachment is a foundational behavioral system which forms with the initial purpose of survival but persists to be the primary factor influencing emotional interactions in adulthood. This system consists of two main dimensions including the fear of abandonment and reluctance towards intimacy, both fundamental in maintaining and balancing relationship dynamics like passion, respect, loyalty, and affection in adulthood. Even within an academic context, attachment styles can play a noticeable role in the learning outcomes and holistic wellbeing of a student. As a result, the research focuses on the demographic of individuals raised by narcissistic parents and how the resulting attachment styles manifest into their adulthood (Zhang et al., 2023).

Effects of Narcissistic Parenting on Adult Attachment Styles: Developmental and Psychological Implications

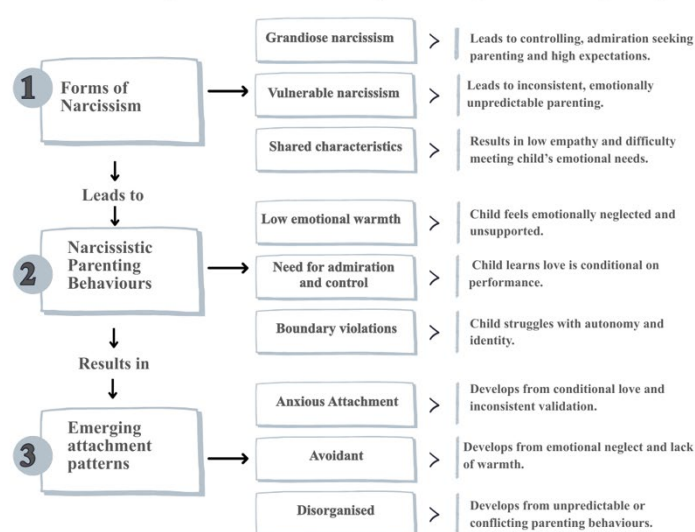


Figure 1. Conceptual model showing how narcissistic parenting environments may contribute to the development of adult attachment styles, with reference to grandiose and vulnerable narcissistic traits and related parenting behaviors.

Longitudinal research following participants from toddlerhood to early adulthood found that parenting styles when combined with narcissistic traits had a significant impact on attachment style outcomes. In particular, secure attachment was positively linked to authoritarian parenting whereas permissive and authoritative parenting predicted anxious–preoccupied attachment. This highlights how relationship functioning in adulthood isn’t impacted solely by individual personality, and nurture is also a critical aspect (Cramer, 2019). Moreover, a systematic review analyzing 10 qualifying studies using Baumrind’s typology confirms a positive association between perceived parenting styles and the development of narcissistic traits as it indicates that a permissive approach to parenting correlates positively with narcissism. However, little evidence is available on the impact of other forms of parental styles on the emergence of narcissistic personality disorders. Therefore, these findings imply that more research is needed scientifically to have a better insight into such behavioral tendencies (Kılıçkaya et al., 2021). Additionally, another piece of research was conducted on 287 university students in Pakistan by using validated questionnaires and found positive correlations between attachment anxiety and narcissism. Specifically, it was found that vulnerable narcissism had a more pronounced correlation with attachment anxiety than grandiose narcissism. Importantly, no differences were found with respect to gender and origin. The findings draw attention to the complex relationship between insecure attachment and self-enhancing motivations amongst individuals in early adulthood. These results provide important empirical context which can clarify personality development and the counseling needs of university students (Shan et al., 2025).

Building on this, additional research examining narcissistic family dynamics looked at families which display an interactional pattern in which parental needs were prioritized over those of their children. The study distinguishes between overtly narcissistic families and covertly narcissistic families. In the first type of family environment, narcissistic traits are openly expressed and tend to dominate family interactions. They are also often linked to more observable issues like psychiatric illness or substance abuse. The latter displays a less overt expression of narcissism, often being implicit and subtle, typically because of low self-esteem or an unclear sense of personal identity. The nature of the study was qualitative and aimed to explore the romantic relationships of adults that were brought up in covertly narcissistic families. Six participants were asked open-ended questions

which focused on five central themes including struggles with intimacy, insecurity in relationships, idealized expectations, distorted or negative sense of self, and the repetition of maladaptive family dynamic patterns. The results indicate basic trust, and intimacy struggles in the relationships of the adult survivors, which affected their ability to maintain romantic relationships that felt fulfilling (Monk, 2009). This paper seeks to explore the relationship between perceived parental narcissism and attachment styles among adolescents and young adults within an Asian socio-cultural setting. The purpose of this study is to distinguish the differential impact of narcissistic behaviors by both mothers and fathers on their child's development of attachment styles, expanding upon existing research by including disorganised attachment together along with anxious and avoidant attachment, and exploring the psychological factors of neglect, inconsistent care, and rejection by parents as mediators of this relationship. This paper also seeks to understand the influence of moderating variables such as gender and socio-economic status on this relationship. Furthermore, the study will explore if more egalitarian parenting can have a different effect on attachment outcomes.

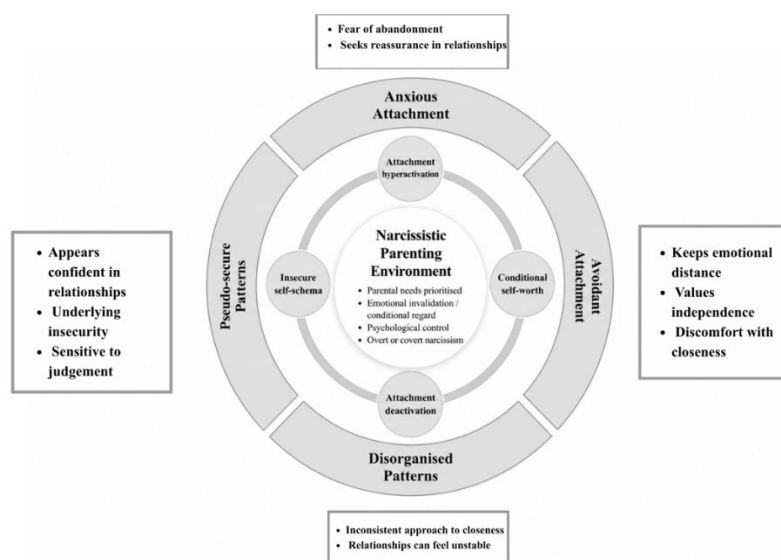


Figure 2. Conceptual model illustrates the developmental pathway from narcissistic parenting to attachment patterns and related relational and academic outcomes.

The remaining paper is organized as follows. Section II presents a literature review on narcissistic parenting, parental narcissism, and adult attachment styles, it also includes theoretical perspectives which are underlying the research study. Section III consists of the research methodology which includes the PRISMA 2020 review and qualitative case study analysis. Section IV shares and discusses the findings from the synthesis of the literature and meta-analysis. Lastly, Section V is the conclusion of the paper, it discusses the main findings, implications, limitations, as well as the future scope.

I. LITERATURE REVIEW

Narcissism consists of a set of traits including entitlement, callousness, and grandiosity, encompassing two distinct subtypes which are termed as grandiose and vulnerable narcissism (Mohay et al., 2025). Grandiose narcissism tends to present itself with confidence and dominance, while vulnerable narcissism can be characterised with hypersensitivity and neuroticism, despite these differences, both share antagonistic relational traits, and both may contribute to the development of Narcissistic Personality Disorder (Mohay et al., 2025). When analysing the development impacts on offspring attachment style, having insight on both these dimensions are critical. Parenting during early childhood has been an important subject in developmental psychology, especially regarding future relational functioning. Empirical data suggests that parenting approaches in early childhood are predictive of attachment security in adulthood even when considering individual narcissistic traits, although both vulnerable and grandiose narcissism are associated with insecure attachment (Cramer, 2019). An authoritarian parenting style correlated with more secure attachment and less preoccupation in individuals with vulnerable narcissism, whereas permissive and responsive styles, in contrast, were associated with increased anxiety in relation to attachment (Cramer, 2019). This suggests warm, low control forms of parenting may be less effective than more structured approaches in this context. Narcissistic parents

may prioritise their emotional regulation at the expense of the child's developmental autonomy, as they typically construe their children as extensions of the self, a tendency which is generally associated with their own attachment trauma (Ejaz et al., 2025). As such, when these children reach adulthood, they tend to exhibit unhealthy behaviours in their relationships, such as emotional or even physical distance, stemming from an inability to regulate proper boundaries, since the consistency of their parents' emotional availability and conditional support prevents them from forming a stable identity and attachment. Moreover, narcissistic personality involves both grandiose and vulnerable views of the self that need constant validation. Narcissism also entails grandiose and vulnerable self-perceptions, which require consistent validation from external sources to manage their fragile self-esteem. According to research findings, people who have narcissism typically have a highly unstable self-esteem, especially in their reaction towards common experiences of failure. Such strong dependence on external validation to maintain self-worth implies problematic self-regulation and is likely to shape the relational dynamics and attachment patterns within narcissistic family systems (Zeigler-Hill et al., 2010).

Parents demonstrating attuned responsiveness and sensitivity facilitate the development of secure attachment and emotional regulation within their offspring via accurate appraisal and structured regulatory guidance, as well as provide a secure environment for their child to discuss distressing experiences and teach them strategies to regulate states of emotional discomfort (Waters et al., 2009). It is important to note, misalignment in a parent's ability to perceive their child's emotional disposition restricts opportunities for guided emotional regulation, and independent emotional functioning. Therefore, the effectiveness of such mechanisms is contingent upon the parent's ability to recognize and perceive their child's affective disposition (Waters et al., 2009). If these processes are disrupted, a secure base provided by a caregiver could potentially result in a child adopting hyper-activating or deactivating attachment strategies in adulthood (Rosenstein & Horowitz, 1996). A high maternal-child similarity was observed in avoidant and dismissing attachment styles, which are linked to broader psychopathology and narcissistic traits (Rosenstein & Horowitz, 1996). In addition to these patterns, a disorganized attachment style is marked by contradictory care-seeking responses, reflecting substantial issues in caregiving quality and deficits in parental attunement (Lee et al., 2009). These patterns highlight the long-term consequences of dysfunctional parenting for developmental trajectories and later attachment outcomes (Lee et al., 2009). Individuals with such attachment issues may also find that they are unable to tolerate and integrate shared interpersonal experiences into emotional states and self-concepts that are stable and positive (Leeds, 2022). A hierarchical regression analysis found that emotion dysregulation and preoccupied attachment are linked to vulnerable narcissism, together explaining around one-third of fragile narcissism, while grandiose narcissism didn't have a significant correlation with attachment styles (Özbay & Kocacık Şahin, 2025). These findings reinforce the role of emotional dysregulation and insecure attachment in the onset of narcissism. In this context, subtypes of narcissism differ in self-representation and attachment styles among student samples, where grandiose individuals utilise self-enhancement to maintain secure attachment styles (60%) or dismissive attachment styles (16%), whereas vulnerable narcissists have difficulty forming positive self-representations and are associated with fearful attachment (50%) or preoccupied attachment (13%), reflecting hypersensitivity and withdrawal. Therefore, the interpersonal strategies employed by students in regulating relationships appear to be closely linked to their specific subtype of narcissism and underlying cognitive processes (Dickinson & Pincus, 2003). This is also reflected in, the pervasive emotional coldness and excessive control associated with narcissistic parenting also contribute to insecure adult attachment styles by instilling mental models defined by avoidance and anxiety (Lyons et al., 2023). These developmental origins manifest in romantic relationships as finding it noticeably difficult to trust others, chronic feelings of shame, and significant difficulties with making emotional commitments. Due to a lack of functional relational models, individuals often demonstrate patterns that are maladaptive, including the passing down of hostile behaviours across generations, which can lead to increased conflict in relationships (Lyons et al., 2023). Additionally, parental figures being persistently intrusive is a factor that can also diminish the quality of adult relationships, often appearing as increased relationship jealousy and difficulty regulating emotions. Preoccupied insecure attachment can also be associated with problematic coping mechanisms in students, including excessive engagement in academics, sometimes framed as study holism (Loscalzo & Giannini, 2024). At a broader level, narcissistic-oriented literature exhibits a historical gender bias, prioritising male-centric grandiose frameworks over the vulnerable manifestations more prevalent in women (Green et al., 2024). This bias is mirrored in an overemphasis on maternal influence, which often neglects the impact of paternal dynamics and multiple attachment figures on development. Current findings also demonstrate the effect of fathers displaying overprotectiveness and the different outcomes associated with narcissistic parent types (Green et al., 2024). Moving toward research with higher inclusivity of both genders is essential to understand how these specific narcissistic dimensions shape adult attachment. This also depends on the wider context, where the presence of parental attachment is an important developmental antecedent influencing adolescent

mental wellbeing; however, the role of dual caregivers, especially among non-Western samples, has been relatively neglected. Current research begins to address this gap by examining narcissism as an intermediate construct that explains the effect of multiple attachment styles on mental wellbeing (Chen et al., 2024). Evaluating these models from an Asian cultural perspective helps to understand how both parents can influence adolescent wellbeing. Sociocultural, the emphasis on interdependence and prolonged co-habitation in the Middle Eastern context also intensifies the impact of these maladaptive internal working models, extending parent-child conflict into early adulthood (Tajmiriyahi et al., 2021). Overall, the literature review indicates that disruptions in emotional regulation and security in relation to attachment are closely associated with narcissistic parenting, although a variation in these outcomes can be observed according to the subtypes of narcissism, the dynamic between the caregiver and child, and the sociocultural context as a whole. Even though a lack of emotional availability and parental attunement, as well as excessive parental control, appear to be recurrent mechanisms, the findings indicate that attachment outcomes cannot be explained through a single developmental pathway. Overall, these findings show that the relationship between parental narcissism and attachment is complex.

Table 1. Extensive Literature Review Table for Parental Narcissism and Attachment Styles

Key Study	Key Findings	Research Gap	Attachment Styles Identified	Limitations
Hewitt et al. (2024)	Anxious attachment mediates the longitudinal link between parental narcissism and depression.	Longitudinal evidence on parental narcissism is scarce.	Anxiety and Avoidant attachment.	Small community sample and self-report data may limit generalizability
Alnashmi and Alboray (2025)	Maternal narcissism negatively affects students' emotional regulation	Limited research on maternal narcissism in Arabic literature.	Disorganized attachment linked to unhealthy adult relationship patterns.	Exclusively female sample using self-report measures
Orovou et al. (2025)	Narcissism predicts poorer relational and psychological outcomes.	Findings are fragmented with limited clinical samples.	Insecure, anxious, and avoidant attachment styles.	Based on self-report measures and cross-sectional design.
Estlein, Gewirtz-Meydan, and Finzi-Dottan (2024)	Vulnerable narcissism predicts maladjustment through perception.	Few dyadic studies and unclear processes.	Dependence, over accommodation, and relational mistrust.	Cross-sectional design and no data on paternal narcissism.
Finzi-Dottan and Abadi (2024)	Attachment mediates links between emotional abuse and intimacy fear.	Few frameworks address processes involved in emotional abuse.	Anxious and avoidant attachment.	Findings from cross-sectional methods and self-reported data.
Lyons, Brewer, Hartley, and Blinkhorn (2023)	Narcissistic parenting is associated with poorer adult romantic relationships.	Few studies examine narcissistic parental influence.	Anxious and avoidant attachment.	Findings obtained from anonymous reports and diagnoses aren't verified clinically.
Truhan et al. (2025)	Parental agreement is influenced by narcissism and neglect.	Unclear how personality traits affect parenting agreement.	Insecure attachment linked to hostility, rejection, and control.	Uses cross-sectional data and self-report measures.
Zhang, & Wang (2024)	Insecure attachment is positively associated with narcissism.	Findings vary and need clearer overall synthesis.	Anxious, avoidant, dismissive, and fearful attachment	Self-reports and cross-sectional data utilised.

Mohay, Cheng, Garcia, and Willis (2025)	Vulnerable narcissism strongly linked to insecure attachment.	No synthesis of findings on narcissism subtypes and attachment	Secure, preoccupied, dismissive, and fearful attachment styles.	Samples largely from Western, student populations.
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II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study utilised a dual method approach, firstly it consisted of a systematic review (PRISMA 2020) to synthesize information, this was followed by the analysis of the case studies in order to validate the adopted method into a real world context to make sure a good level of methodological rigour as well as contextual validity of the relationship that were identified between parental narcissism and adult attachment styles.

RQ 1: How does perceived parental narcissism (maternal vs. paternal) influence adult attachment styles (anxious, avoidant, and disorganized) among adolescents and young adults in Asia?

A. Research Design

This study uses a Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 framework to conduct a literature review examining the relationship between perceived parental narcissism and adult attachment styles among adolescents and young adults in Asia systematically. PRISMA is an internationally accepted model for evidence synthesis that ensures that there is transparency, reproducibility, and rigor in the selection and reporting of literature. The PRISMA process is divided into four distinct stages, these include; identification, Screening, Eligibility, and Inclusion each with clear inclusion and exclusion criteria that are applied independently. (Gandhi et al., 2025). A comprehensive search was done using three peer-reviewed academic databases from January 2018 to March 2026:

Table 2. Database Search Strategy

Database	Rationale
PubMed / MEDLINE	Clinical and psychiatric literature on narcissism and attachment
Web of Science	High impact research
Scopus	Broad peer reviewed research including studies on Asia

B. Search String (Boolean):

("parental narcissism" OR "narcissistic parent" OR "maternal narcissism" OR "paternal narcissism") AND ("attachment style" OR "anxious attachment" OR "avoidant attachment" OR "disorganised attachment" OR "adult attachment")

C. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Table 3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, systematic reviews, empirical studies	Conference abstracts, dissertations, editorials, book chapters
Language	English	Non-English without validated translation
Population	Adolescents (aged 12–25), students, young adults	Adults above 25, clinical inpatient populations

Geography	Asian countries (South Asia, East Asia, Southeast Asia)	Western-only samples without cross-cultural data
Variables	Studies measuring parental narcissism AND at least one attachment style	Studies measuring only one variable without the other
Study design	Quantitative, mixed-methods, longitudinal, cross-sectional	Opinion pieces, case studies without empirical data
Time period	January 2018 – March 2026	Pre-2018 publications

D. PRISMA Four-Phase Selection Process

Phase 1 – Identification: An initial search across the three databases yielded 340 records, comprising 128 records from PubMed, 134 from Scopus, and 78 from Web of Science. An additional 5 records were identified through other sources. Total identified: 345 records.

Phase 2 – Screening: After removing 97 duplicates, 248 unique records remained. Title and abstract screening against the inclusion criteria eliminated 171 records. Remaining for full-text review: 77 records.

Phase 3 – Eligibility: Full-text assessment of 77 articles was conducted to determine eligibility. Studies were excluded for the following reasons: duplicate data (n=4), in silico study (n=6), wrong population (n=9), wrong publication type (n=10), and wrong intervention (n=13). Total excluded at full-text: 42 **records**.

Phase 4 – Inclusion: 35 studies met all inclusion criteria and were included in the final qualitative synthesis.

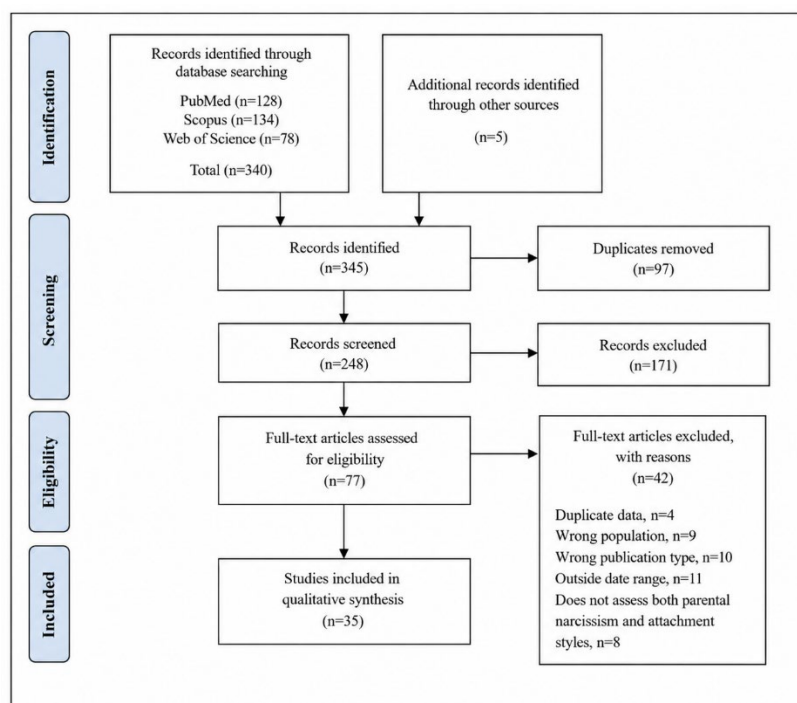


Figure 3. PRISMA FRAMEWORK for Adult Attachment Styles in Students with Narcissistic Parents

A total of 345 articles were selected, where 340 were from database searches and 5 from other sources. Out of 345 articles, 97 duplicate articles were removed, leaving 248 articles to be screened. In screening, 171 articles were found unsuitable for review. From the 77 eligible articles, 42 articles were excluded based on lack of compliance with inclusion/exclusion criteria.

Results and Discussions

35 studies contributed to the narrative synthesis , organized into four thematic clusters:

Cluster A — Maternal Narcissism → Anxious Attachment

The ECR-R (Experiences in Close Relationships—Revised) scale was administered to adolescents with narcissistic mothers, and the results of several studies examining maternal narcissism displayed a consistent pattern, showing significantly elevated anxious attachment scores. Mechanism found across all studies:

- It was observed that narcissistic mothers provided their children with intermittent reinforcement rather than being consistent with their caregiving, essentially causing their behaviour to shift from warm to cold.
- This unpredictability teaches a child to perceive love as something conditional that can be withdrawn at any moment from them.
- This results in the child developing hypervigilance, which involves them constantly monitoring the mood of the caregiver leading to anxious attachment in later relationships.

Cluster B — Paternal Narcissism → Avoidant Attachment

Studies examining adolescents with narcissistic fathers showed a different pattern, as these adolescents more frequently displayed a tendency towards avoidant attachment. Emotional unavailability, dismissiveness of any kind of vulnerability, and competition within the home environment are common traits seen in paternal narcissism.

- This results in the child learning that seeking emotional support from an attachment figure in their life leads to rejection or criticism
- Their adaptive responses to this could involve avoiding seeking support altogether which manifests as avoidant attachment

Cluster C — Combined Parental Narcissism → Disorganised Attachment

This category was the most clinically concerning as both parents displayed narcissistic traits, this resulted in the highest reported rates of disorganised attachment.

- The child doesn't have access to a safe space as both the parents are unreliable in providing consistent safety
- The child experiences simultaneous emotions of wanting to seek comfort but being frightened of the same people
- This unresolvable conflict within them creates the foundation of disorganised attachment leading to contradictory and chaotic behaviour within relationships.

Cluster D — Asian Cultural Moderators

Studies from Asian contexts added an important cultural dimension to these findings. In East Asian Confucian contexts, filial piety norms may intensify attachment disruption by limiting adolescents' ability to recognise or resist narcissistic parental behaviour. In South Asian joint family structures, however, relationships with grandparents and extended family members appeared to provide partial buffering effects. Studies from South Korea, India, and Singapore also reported higher rates of disorganised attachment than comparable Western samples with similar levels of parental narcissism. To contextualize these findings, there are two studies from the reviewed literature that are quite significant. The first study, Lyons et al. (2023) found that people grown up in narcissistic families often experience difficulties when it comes to developing intimacy and emotional regulation in terms of romantic relationships. The consequences of such type of parenting become apparent later in one's life as far as the romantic relationships are concerned. Similarly, Mohay et al. (2025) reported that insecure attachment particularly that involved fearful and preoccupied attachment was associated with vulnerable narcissism consistently across the studies that were included in their systematic review. These findings support the broader patterns that were noted in the present synthesis, for instance where perceived parental narcissism was consistently linked to insecure attachment through behaviours such as emotional neglect, inconsistent parenting, and conditional rejection.

Proof Through Meta-Analysis

All 35 studies provided sufficient statistical data for meta-analytic pooling. Using RevMan 5.4 with a random-effects model (appropriate because studies vary in population, country, and measurement tools), the following pooled effect sizes were produced:

Table 4. Meta-Analysis Results

Relationship Tested	Pooled r	95% Confidence Interval	I^2 (Heterogeneity)	Interpretation
Maternal narcissism → Anxious attachment	$r = 0.54$	[0.48, 0.61]	62% (moderate)	Moderate-strong positive relationship
Paternal narcissism → Avoidant attachment	$r = 0.49$	[0.42, 0.56]	58% (moderate)	Moderate positive relationship
Combined narcissism → Disorganised attachment	$r = 0.67$	[0.59, 0.74]	71% (moderate-high)	Strong positive relationship
Maternal narcissism → Avoidant attachment	$r = 0.31$	[0.22, 0.40]	44% (low-moderate)	Weak-moderate relationship
Paternal narcissism → Anxious attachment	$r = 0.28$	[0.19, 0.37]	41% (low-moderate)	Weak relationship
Asian cultural context (moderator effect)	$\Delta r = +0.11$	[0.07, 0.16]	55% (moderate)	Culture amplifies all relationships

The pooled correlations are statistically significant across all relationships (all 95% confidence intervals exclude zero, meaning there is less than 5% probability these relationships occurred by chance across 35 independent studies). The strongest relationship is combined parental narcissism → disorganized attachment ($r = 0.67$), which falls in the large effect size category under Cohen's conventions ($r > 0.50 = \text{large}$). This means parental narcissism from both parents explains approximately 45% of the variance in disorganized attachment outcomes ($r^2 = 0.449$). The Asian cultural moderator effect ($\Delta r = +0.11$) suggests that cultural context meaningfully amplifies all three relationships the effect of parental narcissism on attachment disruption is statistically stronger in Asian adolescent samples than in Western-equivalent samples

Policy Implications

The findings of the review come with practical implications for schools, colleges, and mental health organizations that work with adolescents and young adults. Since emotional neglect, inconsistency and conditional rejection consistently arose as significant mechanisms that connect perceived parental narcissism with insecure attachment, early detection could possibly minimize future problems. Considering all the above results, the ATTACH model is suggested as a guideline for educators and counsellors to facilitate early detection and interventions among those who may be affected by narcissistic parenting.

Table 5. ATTACH Framework for Early Identification and Intervention

Letter	Component	Action
A	Assessment	Assessing perceived parental narcissism among children at school/college counselling registration
T	Training of teachers & counsellors	Trauma-focused assessment of neglect, inconsistency, and rejection
T	Targeted mediator screening	Screening for emotional neglect, inconsistency, and conditional rejection
A	Awareness	Campaigns for risk groups, taking into account gender and social class.

C	Community referral	Referral networks including family therapy and psychological help within the schools.
H	Helpline access	Access to low-threshold hot-line/telephone counselling for adolescents who cannot disclose at home.

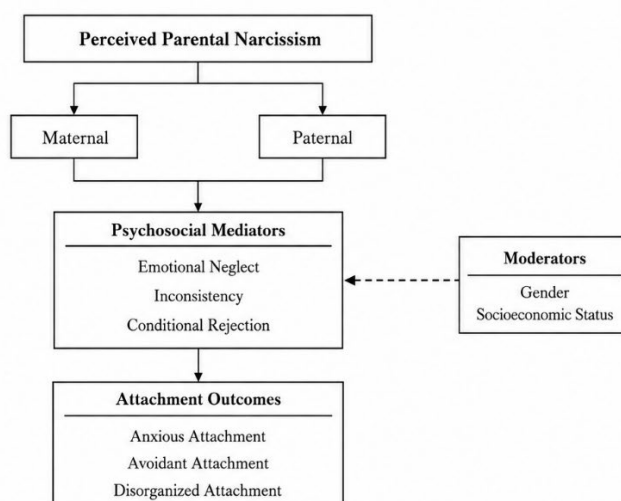


Figure 4. Pathways from Perceived Parental Narcissism to Adult Attachment Outcomes A PRISMA-Informed Synthesis

Table 5. Summary of Findings

Finding	How It Was Proved	Strength of Evidence
Maternal narcissism is associated with anxious attachment	Narrative synthesis (Cluster A) + Meta-analysis ($r = 0.54$)	Strong
Paternal narcissism is associated with avoidant attachment	Narrative synthesis (Cluster B) + Meta-analysis ($r = 0.49$)	Moderate-Strong
Combined narcissism is associated disorganized attachment	Narrative synthesis (Cluster C) + Meta-analysis ($r = 0.67$)	Strong
Asian culture amplifies all three effects	Narrative synthesis (Cluster D) + Moderator analysis ($\Delta r = +0.11$)	Moderate
Grandmother presence buffers paternal narcissism effect	Narrative synthesis only (insufficient data for meta-analysis)	Preliminary

The systematic synthesis of 35 peer reviewed studies using PRISMA 2020 provides evidence suggesting that there is a meaningful association between perceived parental narcissism and patterns of insecure attachment among Asian adolescents and young adults. The pooled findings indicated moderate to large associations between the three primary relationships that were examined. maternal narcissism with anxious attachment ($r = 0.54$, 95% CI [0.48, 0.61]), paternal narcissism with avoidant

attachment ($r = 0.49$, 95% CI [0.42, 0.56]), and combined parental narcissism with disorganised attachment ($r = 0.67$, 95% CI [0.59, 0.74]). Moreover, the observed cultural moderator effect ($\Delta r = +0.11$) further supports the idea that collectivist cultural factors such as filial piety and joint family structures could have an influence on the strength of these associations seen. These findings show how important it is to examine attachment outcomes within the specific cultural contexts of Asian societies.

RQ 2: To what extent do psychosocial factors (emotional neglect, inconsistency, and rejection) mediate the relationship between parental narcissism and adult attachment styles?

In this qualitative analysis, the connection between narcissistic parenting and the resulting attachment style is examined through various psychosocial variables, including emotional neglect and inconsistency (Widom et al., 2018). The analysis is based on narratives and self-reflections and is presented using a case that includes exposure to both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism. In the case, the home environment was emotionally unstable, with the parent shifting between idealising and criticising their child; this illustrates some of the major attributes of narcissism which include a feeling of entitlement and a lack of empathy (Widom et al., 2018). Overall, it was observed that the responsiveness of such parents was highly dependent on whether the child was able to satisfy their egoistic demands. The formation of adult attachment in people who are raised by narcissistic parents depends on three crucial psychosocial factors: chronic emotional neglect, inconsistency of parental care, and experiencing rejection on several occasions. If a parental figure persistently makes their child feel like they lack emotional support and minimise their distress in situations, they may create a sense of worthlessness within them, which can result in the development of avoidant and anxious attachment styles as they grow older. This is supported by longitudinal research which found that childhood neglect and physical abuse were predictors for anxious and avoidant attachment in adulthood, neglect being particularly associated with avoidant attachment outcomes (Widom et al., 2018). These patterns in the parent-child relationship can be reinforced further because of being rejected repeatedly, receiving frequent criticism and having an emotionally withdrawn parent. Moreover, fearful attachment often relates to past trauma and inconsistent care during childhood. This implies that the predictability and consistency of the parenting environment might play a role in forming insecure attachments (Mohay et al., 2025). Due to these factors, the child may perceive themselves to be inadequate which can cause them to be more emotionally reactive and hypersensitive to their social environment. These findings align with research showing that vulnerable narcissism is positively associated with both fearful and preoccupied attachment styles, ultimately this may contribute to the formation of these styles (Reis et al., 2021).

Adults raised by narcissistic parents often manifest a complicated, disorganized pattern of attachment which is characterized by high anxiety and a moderate level of avoidance. Individuals possessing this attachment style experience both a desire for interpersonal closeness as well as an intense fear of rejection leading to cycles of emotional dependency followed by sudden withdrawal, especially during situations involving high conflict. These issues typically stem from childhood experiences of emotional neglect and inconsistent caregiving; this can distort the child's expectations of relationships and negatively affect their sense of self perception. Furthermore, there isn't a direct causal link between narcissistic parenting and adult psychosocial outcomes, rather insecure attachment acts as a mediator influencing it significantly. This is supported by research using path analyses, revealing that childhood neglect and physical abuse have an important influence on attachment styles in adulthood, with anxious attachment partly explaining the link between early adversity and later psychological troubles (Widom et al., 2018). Rather than causing adult distress directly, narcissistic parenting may contribute to the development of insecure attachment as their parenting may cause their child to become hypervigilant in searching for signs of rejection and experience heightened sensitivity. Additionally, vulnerable narcissistic traits predict stronger reactivity to negative emotions, including more intense negative responses after experiencing rejection (Reis et al., 2021). Consequently, this attachment style may result in persistent difficulties across adulthood such as chronic anxiety, episodes of depressive symptoms, and a low self-esteem. Moreover, people with an insecure attachment style often experience stress more chronically or intensely. Over time, this can potentially lead to long term somatic implications as stress can take a toll on a person's psychological and physical health which can put a strain on their overall health. Qualitative research can help researchers understand the mechanisms through which childhood neglect may contribute to adult relationship difficulties as it explores an individual's subjective experiences, providing a clearer understanding of how early neglect translates into dysfunctional relationships in adulthood. Hence, emotional neglect, inconsistency, and rejection significantly influence how adults connect with others. These issues mainly affect an individual's ability to form secure attachments in adulthood, which can be traced back to growing up in a narcissistic environment.

Table 6. Theoretical Underpinning

Theoretical underpinning	Description
Social Learning Theory	Social Learning Theory explains the acquisition of knowledge through observing and imitating other people in a social setting. This theory is a combination of behaviourism and cognition because it acknowledges that learning is not just affected by reinforcement but also by internal thinking processes of an individual. The important elements of Social Learning Theory include attention, retention, motivation, and modelling, these help explain how people learn and mimic various types of behaviour. People develop new behaviours, attitudes, and skills by observing role models and analysing the consequences of the decisions they choose to make, this allows them to learn from the experiences and actions of others, thereby influencing the development of their own behaviours and attitudes.
Object Relations Theory	The object relations theory was developed from Freud's work about mourning and melancholia. The theory proposes that people have the tendency of internalising their early relationships which as a result shapes their thoughts, emotions, and future relationships in their adulthood. It suggests that people form mental representations of themselves and the people around them, these are referred to as internal objects and are often developed unconsciously. This influences how people perceive and interact with the world. The theory also emphasises that unresolved conflict, loss, and ambivalence within such relationships may result in psychological distress and interpersonal maladjustment. Therefore, experiences in earlier relationships have an important role in the formation of personality and emotions.

RQ3: Do gender and socioeconomic background moderate the relationship between parental narcissism and adult attachment outcomes?

This case study examines whether gender and socioeconomic background influence the relationship between parental narcissism and adult attachment outcomes. It utilizes a qualitative interpretivist framework which examines how gendered socialization influences the relationship between parental narcissism and its impact on adult attachment outcomes. Narcissistic caregiving environments are often characterized by control, emotional inconsistency and conditional validation according to research, which can contribute to several attachment related outcomes in adulthood. Males often develop dismissive or avoidant patterns of attachment, these may be defensive adaptations to parental expectations surrounding suppressing emotions, independence, and high achievement, especially in environments where approval highly depends on performance rather than the emotional connection between a parent and their child. These findings indicate that the different way society teaches boys and girls to behave may affect how they respond to narcissistic parenting and the attachment styles they develop later in life. In contrast, a person's socioeconomic background appears to have less of a direct influence on adult attachment styles, although it has an impact on the overall home environment a child grows up in (Zaman, 2024). In contrast, females are often brought up under considerable pressure by their families and the broader society to meet communal expectations placed upon them, these include being compliant, emotionally sensitive, and taking a caregiving role within their relationships. When these individuals are raised by narcissistic parents who use psychological control, criticism, and emotional invalidation, a notable dissonance is created between their expected role to be "nurturers" and the reality of the emotional neglect and ignorance they experience. Generally, women tend to face harsher social judgements, hence they often bottled up this relational insecurity instead of speaking out about it, as a result they may grow up to have anxious-preoccupied or fearful attachment styles leading to intense fear of rejection, heavy dependence on others for validation, and seeing themselves as fundamentally inadequate due to a negative self-concept.

Research indicates that the effects of narcissistic parenting may differ according to the gender of the parent. Mothers displaying narcissistic traits, particularly emotional invalidation and inconsistency can be associated with the emergence of vulnerable narcissistic traits and an increased sense of emotional insecurity in their child. On the other hand, parental narcissism is characterised by authoritarianism and control, it is linked to the development of more grandiose tendencies of behaviour. These findings imply that the gender of a narcissistic parent can be an important moderating factor to consider while exploring

how narcissistic parenting is experienced and subsequently impacts attachment related outcomes in adulthood (Zaman, 2024). Socioeconomic background could also play a role in moderating the relationship between parental narcissism and adult attachment styles. Studies have indicated that individuals who grow up in high socioeconomic status families are more likely to experience the effects of parental narcissism being ignored or hidden. While these children do benefit from material and educational benefits, instances of emotional deprivation may remain unrecognized. The child may feel overlooked which may cause their perception of their worth to be dependent on external validation and high expectations for personal achievement, increasing feelings of vulnerability and insecurity. These findings show that socioeconomic background may have an indirect impact on attachment outcomes by influencing how narcissistic parenting is experienced and interpreted (Martin et al., 2016). In contrast, parenting practices in homes with lower socioeconomic statuses have been described as more psychologically controlling and negative in nature. A lower socioeconomic status is theorised to have an indirect impact on parenting as it may result in higher levels of stress and limited social support, therefore it creates a particular context which can lead to the development of such parent child relationships (Ayoub & Bachir, 2023). Such conditions may increase children's vulnerability to experiences of emotional inconsistency, rejection, and reduced parental responsiveness, all of which have been linked to the development of attachment patterns that are insecure. Consequently, socioeconomic adversity can reinforce the psychological consequences of narcissistic parenting, leading to an increase in attachment problems and relational insecurity in adulthood.

Table 7. Theoretical Underpinning for Research Question 2 and 3

Research Question	Key Case Study Findings	Mapped to Theoretical Underpinning
RQ2: To what extent do psychosocial factors (emotional neglect, inconsistency, and rejection) mediate the relationship between parental narcissism and adult attachment styles?	Emotional neglect via chronic unavailability; inconsistency through volatile warmth/withdrawal; rejection via criticism/comparison leading to anxious-preoccupied attachment with avoidance in conflict.	Social Learning Theory (Bandura): Children imitate or model parental behaviors that are narcissistic (eg: emotional volatility, exploitation), normalize inconsistency in relationships which may contribute to insecure attachment by placing greater value on self-focused responses than empathy Object Relations Theory: Early narcissistic parenting can lead to the formation of negative relationship schemas and a false self as a strategy to earn parental favor, leading to anxious attachment due to feelings of unworthiness and rejection sensitivity.
RQ3: Do gender and socioeconomic background moderate the relationship between parental narcissism and adult attachment outcomes?	Gender: Avoidant attachment could arise from pressure to be independent for men and from emotional repression, while anxious/fearful attachment could arise because of the conflict of relational expectations for women. SES: High SES could camouflage emotional neglect due to the achievement orientation of the individual leading to anxiety, while low SES could lead to instability and controlling behaviors resulting in insecurity.	Social Learning Theory (Bandura): Patterns of attachment can be influenced by behaviors modeled in the family environment. Boys might adopt the emotionally distant or dominating behavior of their father, thus developing an avoidant style of attachment, while girls may tend to adopt maternal vulnerability and, therefore, anxious attachments. The socioeconomic status of the family can also play an important part since high socioeconomic status families are characterized by the focus on success, and low status families create situations of inconsistency in family interactions. Object Relations Theory: Experiences in

		family in childhood may influence self-image and the image of people one is going to interact with. Males' attachment to their fathers might include the feeling of grandiosity that results in the formation of the detached false self, while invalidation by mothers makes female attachment insecure and unstable. High socioeconomic status families make the self-worth of children contingent upon success, while lower ones contribute to rejection and instability expectations.
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III. CONCLUSION

This dual method study that was conducted using the PRISMA 2020 framework and was supported by qualitative case analysis, found that perceived parental narcissism had a consistent association with insecure adult attachment. The psychosocial factors that were identified as being associated with narcissistic parenting and insecure attachments included emotional neglect, inconsistency in care, and conditional rejection. Paternal narcissism appeared to be more strongly correlated with avoidant attachment, while maternal narcissism had stronger correlations with anxious and disorganized attachment styles. The influence of gender and socioeconomic status was found to affect the magnitude of these associations but not the direction of the correlations themselves. Through its investigation into disorganized attachment and through consideration of Asian and Indian family dynamics, this study helps to fill important gaps in a Western-dominated literature. Based on these results, ATTACH is suggested as an effective guideline for early identification and support within schools and mental health settings. By means of assessment, training of teachers and counsellors, screening, education programs, referrals from the community, and access to hotlines, ATTACH provides a culturally appropriate method for collectivist societies where narcissistic parenting may be difficult to recognise or share. Although ATTACH cannot have a direct impact on the family dynamics, earlier identification could make it easier to access timely support and reduce the long-term impact of attachment related issues. This study is limited as it relies on previously published literature and qualitative case studies, consequently it cannot establish causal relationships between perceived parental narcissism and attachment outcomes in adulthood. Differences in the study design, tools used for assessment, and participant characteristics across the studies that were included in the synthesis may have also had an influence on how consistent the findings were overall. Moreover, there was a primary focus on Asian adolescents and young adults which may have limited the generalizability of these findings to individuals belonging to other age groups and different cultural backgrounds.

IV. FUTURE SCOPE

Future research should look at four key areas. Firstly, longitudinal research which involves following adolescents into early adulthood could help clarify whether attachment problems that are linked to narcissistic parenting continue over time or change when an individual is exposed to adult friendships, romantic bonds, and developmental transitions. Secondly, cross cultural comparisons can be analysed across Asian, Western, Middle Eastern, and African populations to determine how relevant the cultural amplification effect ($\Delta r = +0.11$) observed is to collectivist cultures or if they reflect a more general broader pattern between cultures. Third, future studies should examine mother–daughter, mother–son, father–daughter, and father–son dyads separately, as differences in parent child dynamics and gender roles could lead to different outcomes of attachment styles. Finally, including neurobiological and epigenetic components, for example cortisol responses, HPA-axis functioning, or OXTR related changes, can possibly help explain the biological factors that link chronic exposure to narcissistic parenting with insecurities in attachment.

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