

Attachment styles and emotional intelligence of social educators working in youth centres: Relationship with work engagement

Estilos de apego e inteligencia emocional de los Educadores Sociales de Centros de Menores: su relación con el compromiso laboral

Estilos de apego e inteligência emocional dos Educadores Sociais de Centros Infantis: a sua relação com o empenho no trabalho

寄养中心社会教育工作者的依恋风格与情感智力：与工作投入的关系

أنماط التعلق والذكاء العاطفي لدى المربين الاجتماعيين في مراكز الأحداث: علاقتها بالالتزام في العمل

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Abstract

The working environment of social educators working at youth centres is highly complex, with an additional challenge being the fact that the children under their care are often presented with a number of challenges. Certain variables related with affective development and emotional competencies are crucial for effective management of social work. The present research explores the relationships between attachment styles, emotional intelligence and work engagement among social educators working at youth centres catering to minors at risk of social exclusion in Andalusia. Present findings revealed significant patterns of association between attachment styles formed during childhood and emotional intelligence in educators working with such minors. It was observed that educators reporting secure attachments perceived themselves as to have a high ability to manage their emotions, whilst those reporting insecure attachments perceived themselves to have less ability. Secure attachment styles did not directly impact levels of work engagement. In contrast, professionals who perceived themselves as having a high ability to intelligently regulate their emotions showed higher engagement in terms of their job functions. Present findings suggest that the relationship of emotional intelligence with attachment and work engagement, plays a crucial role in determining levels of energy, enthusiasm and dedication exhibited by social educators in contexts of care provision for children at risk of social exclusion. This has important implications for the design of socioemotional interventions and support programs in social care provision at youth centres.

Keywords: attachment, emotional intelligence, work engagement, social educator, minors.

Resumen

El entorno laboral de los educadores sociales de centros de menores es complejo, siendo un desafío adicional atender a los perfiles con múltiples dificultades que presentan los menores. En este contexto, ciertas variables relacionadas con su desarrollo afectivo y sus competencias emocionales podrían desempeñar un papel crucial en la efectiva gestión de su trabajo. Esta investigación explora las relaciones entre los estilos de apego, la inteligencia emocional y el compromiso laboral en educadores sociales de centros de menores en riesgo de exclusión social de Andalucía. Los resultados revelaron patrones significativos de asociación entre estilos de apego formados durante la infancia de los educadores de menores y la inteligencia emocional. Se observó que los educadores con un apego seguro se perciben con una alta habilidad para manejar sus emociones, mientras que aquellos con un apego inseguro se percibían con niveles más bajos. El estilo de apego seguro no tuvo un impacto directo en sus niveles de compromiso laboral. En cambio, los profesionales que se perciben con una alta habilidad para regular de manera inteligente sus emociones tuvieron niveles mayores de compromiso en sus funciones laborales. Estos hallazgos sugieren que la relación del apego con la inteligencia emocional y de esta con el compromiso laboral, desempeñan un papel crucial en los niveles de energía, entusiasmo y dedicación de los educadores sociales en contextos de atención a menores en riesgo de exclusión social, teniendo implicaciones importantes para el diseño de intervenciones socioemocionales y programas de apoyo en el ámbito laboral de estos profesionales.

Palabras clave: apego, inteligencia emocional, compromiso laboral, educador social, menores.

Received/Recibido

Mar 21, 2024

Approved /Aprobado

Apr 26, 2024

Published/Publicado

Jun 20, 2024

Resumo

O ambiente de trabalho dos educadores sociais nos centros infantis caracteriza-se pela sua complexidade, sendo um desafio adicional o facto de as crianças ao seu cuidado apresentarem frequentemente perfis com múltiplas dificuldades. Neste contexto, certas variáveis relacionadas com o seu desenvolvimento afetivo e as suas competências emocionais podem desempenhar um papel crucial na gestão eficaz do seu trabalho. Esta investigação explora as relações entre os estilos de apego, a inteligência emocional e o empenho no trabalho dos educadores sociais em centros para menores em risco de exclusão social na Andaluzia.

Os resultados revelaram padrões significativos de associação entre os estilos de apego formados durante a infância dos educadores de menores e a inteligência emocional. Observou-se que os educadores com um apego seguro eram percecionados com uma elevada capacidade de gerir as suas emoções, enquanto os educadores com um apego inseguro eram percecionados com níveis mais baixos. O estilo de apego seguro não teve impacto direto nos seus níveis de empenho no trabalho. Em contrapartida, os profissionais que eram percecionados com uma elevada capacidade de regular inteligentemente as suas emoções tinham níveis mais elevados de empenho nas suas funções profissionais.

Estes resultados sugerem que a relação entre o apego e a inteligência emocional, e entre a inteligência emocional e o empenho no trabalho, desempenham um papel crucial nos níveis de energia, entusiasmo e dedicação dos educadores sociais em contextos de acolhimento de crianças em risco de exclusão social, com implicações importantes para a conceção de intervenções socioemocionais e programas de apoio no ambiente de trabalho destes profissionais.

Palavras-chave: Apego, inteligência emocional, empenho no trabalho, educador social, menores.

摘要

寄养中心的社会教育工作者的工作环境复杂，额外的挑战在于他们照顾的未成年人通常表现出多重困难。在这种情况下，与其情感发展和情感能力相关的某些变量可能在有效管理其工作方面发挥至关重要的作用。本研究探讨了安达卢西亚自治大区寄养中心的社会教育工作者的依恋风格、情感智力和工作投入之间的关系。

结果揭示了寄养中心的教育工作者在童年期间形成的依恋风格与情感智力之间存在显著关联。研究发现，具有安全型依恋的教育工作者被认为具有较高的情感处理能力，而具有不安全型依恋的教育工作者则被认为情感处理能力较低。安全型依恋对其工作投入水平没有直接影响。相反，那些被认为具有高情感调节能力的专业人员在工作职责中的投入水平较高。

这些发现表明，依恋与情感智力之间的关系，以及情感智力与工作投入之间的关系，在寄养中心社会教育工作者的能量、热情和奉献精神水平中起着至关重要的作用，这对设计情感社会干预措施和支持这些专业人员的工作计划具有重要意义。

关键词: 依恋、情商、工作承诺、社会教育工作者、未成年人。

ملخص

تميز بيئة عمل المربين الاجتماعيين في مراكز الأحداث بالتعقيد، وهناك تحدي إضافي يتمثل في أن الفصّر الموجودين تحت رعايتهم عادة ما يواجهون صعوبات متعددة. وفي هذا السياق، يمكن لبعض المتغيرات المتعلقة بتطورهم العاطفي وكفاءاتهم العاطفية أن تلعب دوراً حاسماً في الإدارة الفعالة لعملهم. يستكشف هذا البحث العلاقات بين أنماط التعلق والذكاء العاطفي والالتزام في العمل لدى المربين الاجتماعيين في مراكز الأحداث المعرضين لخطر التهميش الاجتماعي في الأندلس.

وكشفت النتائج عن وجود أنماط ارتباط مهمة ذات دلالة إحصائية بين أساليب التعلق التي تكونت خلال مرحلة الطفولة لدى مربّي الأطفال والذكاء العاطفي. وقد لوحظ أن المعلمين ذوي الارتباط الآمن ينظرون إلى أنفسهم على أنهم يتمتعون بقدرة عالية على إدارة عواطفهم، في حين أن أولئك الذين لديهم ارتباط غير آمن ينظرون إلى أنفسهم على أنهم يتمتعون بمستويات أقل. لم يكن لأسلوب الارتباط الآمن تأثير مباشر على مستويات مشاركتهم في العمل. ومن ناحية أخرى، فإن المهنيين الذين اعتبروا أنفسهم يتمتعون بقدرة عالية على تنظيم عواطفهم بذكاء لديهم مستويات أعلى من الالتزام في مهام عملهم.

تشير هذه النتائج إلى أن العلاقة بين الارتباط والذكاء العاطفي، وهذا مع الالتزام في العمل، تلعب دوراً حاسماً في مستويات الطاقة والحماس والتفاني لدى المربين الاجتماعيين في سياقات رعاية القاصرين المعرضين لخطر التهميش الاجتماعي، ولها آثار مهمة على تصميم التدخلات الاجتماعية والعاطفية وبرامج الدعم في مجال عمل هؤلاء المهنيين.

الكلمات الدالة: التعلق، الذكاء العاطفي، الالتزام بالعمل، المربي الاجتماعي، القاصرين

Introduction

Wellbeing at work is currently a topic of interest of many businesses due to its importance and personal, social and economic impact. Variables such as attachment and emotional intelligence (EI) have been demonstrated to be aspects that influence both wellbeing and performance in workers (Miao et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2022; West, 2015). In this sense, some jobs are more demanding than others, as is the case of educators who work with minors at risk of exclusion. In order to be able to successfully tackle the demands of this job, it seems reasonable to believe that, in a fundamentally relational way, individual variables such as attachment and emotional competencies promote good practice and, therefore, lead to greater wellbeing at work.

The aim of the present study was to examine inter-relationships between attachment styles developed during childhood and EI and its influence on work commitment in social educators working at youth centres with minors at risk of social exclusion.

The concept of attachment

The Royal Spanish Academy defines the word “attachment” as “affinity or inclination towards someone or something”. In this context, the present section will examine the affinity or attachment of children towards their leading care providers who, as a general rule, will firstly be their parents.

In the first year of life, a child’s attachment to their mother, as the main care provider, constitutes an evolutionary goal for socio-emotional development in the child and an indicator of their emotional regulation (Bowlby, 1969, 1979, 1980; Sroufe, 1996). The most important capacity of human beings is their ability to relate with others. This enables them to survive, learn, work, love and procreate. The need for attachment is intrinsically human, given that it unchains a series of behaviours that enables one to survive physically and psychologically (Simó, 2003). Emergence of attachment theory can, without a doubt, be considered to be one of the fundamental milestones of contemporary psychology. Psychoanalytical theory considers

the tight affective bond formed between a baby and their mother to be a result of interested love born out of feeding experiences lived with the mother. Moving away from this standpoint, John Bowlby (1907-1991) conceived an elegant theory within the aetiological framework.

With the passage of time, different types of attachment have been observed between children and their parents. These have been classified into different groups according to the responses inherent to them. The typical approach towards classifying attachment styles follows that proposed by Ainsworth, which distinguishes attachment as secure, evasive and resistant-ambivalent (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Definitions of each is based on children’s responses to a laboratory procedure known as “strange situation”, in which the child is submitted to a series of separations and return encounters with their attachment figure. Some children go quickly towards their mother upon her return and feel comfortable with her (“secure attachment”), whilst others do not exhibit any type of unease at being left alone and avoid or ignore their mother upon her return (“evasive attachment”). Finally, some children do not separate themselves at all from their mother, protest vigorously against being separate and do not calm down during the return encounter (“ambivalent-resistant attachment”). A common error that may befall the professional running the test is waiting for a literal reproduction of these responses, which may occur when the context in which this typology was elaborated is not taken into account (Rodríguez, 2010).

From the 1970s onwards, attachment researchers noted that approximately 10% of cases did not fit in with any of the categories proposed by Ainsworth (secure, evasive and ambivalent). In such cases, such children demonstrated contradictory and conflictive behaviours during the strange situation procedure, challenging the idea of a coherent bonding strategy with the mother. This observation was confirmed in the 1980s, especially, in children who had experienced abuse. Despite the challenge of classifying

such children according to conventional models, Main and Solomon, in the 1990s, proposed a set of “disorganised/disoriented” behaviours pertaining to loss of any feeling of attachment (Main & Solomon, 1990). Following on from this, the same authors conceived an ecological model that suggests that disorganised attachment results from an evolutionary paradox, in which parents trigger fear in their children by being the source of stress (Main et al., 2011).

With regards to attachment in adults, it is noteworthy to observe the way in which attachment functions experience changes throughout the life cycle, adapting to the way in which implicated individuals relate with others, according to the attachment style they adopt (Fraley, 2019). Adults for their own internal models based on care received during childhood from care providers. These patterns tend to remain stable over a long time-period, although they can be modified by new experiences and different quality relationships with significant others (Fraley et al., 2021; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010). In adult life, attachment behaviour tends to be more organised or associated with a romantic partner or friends than with parents. Nonetheless, unanswered questions remain with regards to the link between adults, such as the time needed to form attachment relationships and potential existence of an attachment hierarchy that affects the interactions between individuals (Chopik et al., 2024). In addition, a hypothesis has been proposed regarding existence of a connection between attachment and learning. This represents an intriguing line of research to be followed by other studies (Ortiz-Granja et al., 2019).

With regards to adult life, an increasing number of studies are interested in uncovering the way in which determined personal and social factors impact the work setting, with attachment styles being a focus of interest (London et al., 2023). A number of research studies have shown that adult attachment styles influence variables that are of great importance to businesses, such as self-efficacy, performance and burnout (Leiter et al., 2015;

Virgă et al., 2019). In this sense, various studies have been conducted with social workers, understanding that this concerns a population that is particularly vulnerable to burnout due to the challenges and extreme stress inherent to the job. These studies are included in a systematic review whose findings reveal associations between attachment styles and professional wellbeing in social workers (West, 2015). Specifically, a secure attachment style is associated with low levels of burnout, whilst workers with anxious attachment styles are more likely to develop higher levels of exhaustion (West, 2015).

Emotional intelligence

EI is a concept defined by Mayer and Salovey (1997, p.10) as the “ability to perceive, assimilate, understand and regulate one’s own emotions and those of others, promoting emotional and intellectual growth”. The abilities and competencies that constitute EI, in addition to those corresponding to different forms of assessment, vary, in some cases, significantly, according to the theoretical model framing the research (Joseph & Newman, 2010; Llamas-Díaz et al., 2023; Mayer et al., 1999; 2016). One of the main classifications applied to EI was conceived by Joseph and Newman (2010). This proposes the following three models: (1) mixed model, which considers EI as a very broad concept that incorporates psychological dimensions such as motivation, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, and factors pertaining to personality and wellbeing (Mayer et al., 1999). This model employs self-report measures to evaluate participant’s subjective perceptions; (2) performance-based ability model, which considers EI as a form of intelligence that implies reasoning about one’s emotions (Mayer et al., 1999; 2016) and is evaluated through emotional problem solving. This model employs performance tests that entail correct and incorrect response sets; and (3) self-report ability model, which also considers EI as a combination of emotional abilities. This model uses self-report instruments to enable participants to subjectively estimate their own

EI (Gutiérrez-Cobo et al., 2016; Salguero et al., 2012).

Research consistently demonstrates the beneficial impact of EI in both adolescents and adults. Specifically, higher levels of EI have been associated with better mental health and wellbeing (Davis & Humphrey, 2012; Domínguez-García & Fernández-Berrocal, 2018; Llamas-Díaz et al., 2023), and greater adjustment in both academic and personal contexts (García-Sancho et al., 2014; Gutiérrez-Cobo et al., 2023; MacCann et al., 2020; Rueda et al., 2022; Vega et al., 2022). In the professional context, numerous empirical studies based at organisations have systematically demonstrated the EI plays a decisive role in crucial aspects such as job satisfaction, burnout, commitment and job performance (Joseph et al., 2015; Joseph & Newman, 2010; Miao et al., 2017; O'Boyle et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2022).

With regards to the relationships between attachment and EI, intuitively, it would seem coherent to wait for different attachment styles to influence the way in which adults interact in their social setting and manage their emotions in order to achieve their personal and professional goals, which, in turn, is closely related to EI. Empirical evidence confirms this idea. A recent meta-analysis of 26 studies concluded that EI was significantly related with both secure and insecure attachment (Walker et al., 2022). Specifically, EI was found to be moderately and positively related with secure attachment ($r = .31$) and negatively related with the two main styles of insecure attachment, namely, evasive attachment ($r = -.36$) and anxious attachment ($r = -.25$).

Work commitment

Work commitment is a broadly studied concept in the field of the psychology of health at work. This concept entails the full commitment and dedication of employees to their duties. It comprises the three key elements of vigour, dedication and absorption (Lesener et al., 2020). Vigour refers to high levels of energy, whilst dedication is characterised by huge enthusiasm and

absorption implies full concentration on work tasks (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Committed employees tend to be energetic, enthusiastic and fully concentrated on their work activities (Schaufeli et al., 2006; Mazzetti et al., 2023). In the present study, work commitment is applied as a single and exhaustive measure of the commitment and dedication of employees to the duties of their job.

Research context

In order to correctly understand the present research it is necessary to place it into context by briefly describing the characteristics inherent to child protection centres (residential) and minors attending them.

According to Decree 355/2003, of the 16th of December, for residential care, child protection centres are establishments set up to provide residential care to minors for whom guardianship or custody measures are who have previously been in place. This determines such centres as formative spaces for coexistence in which minors are guaranteed both professional resources and sufficient and adequate material, striving to achieve the warmth that enables affective relationships to emerge inspired in the styles and characteristics of the nuclear family.

Residential care strives to address diversity from an integrational perspective, in which minors are also attended to who present with any type of minor or moderate incapacity or other transitory situation. The current approach is to establish a network of residential assets, whose organisation and functioning is increasingly similar to that of small quasi-family units. The aim of this is to enable minors to live and develop fully under the same or similar conditions as the majority of the population.

Three possible profiles for minors at residential centres can be identified that define current needs and priorities within residential care. Specifically, these profiles pertain to adolescents and young people of both sexes, children arriving through immigration and children with issues that require special attention (Poole et al., 2021). Minors under the

guardianship of local authorities, who reside in child protection centres, are faced by the, normally challenging, situation that, upon reaching adult age, they will have to leave the facility that has been meeting all of their basic needs in order to live independently. In this situation, personal resources such as EI and resilience emerge as powerful protective tools so that these minors can successfully overcome this situation (Bermejo, 2018; Muñoz-Silva, 2012; Palma-García & Hombrados-Mendieta, 2013).

Study aims

The work context of child social workers is complex and comes with the added challenge of the fact that children in care tend to have a profile that is replete with issues. In this sense, determined variables related to affective and emotional development may play an important role when it comes to successfully tackling this type of work. A number of research studies have demonstrated that emotional skills are highly relevant for improving work performance in general (Joseph et al., 2015; Joseph y Newman, 2010; Leiter et al., 2015; Miao et al., 2017; O'Boyle et al., 2011; Vîrgă et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2022). Nonetheless, not a single published study could be identified that has analysed existing relationships between attachment structures in child social workers and self-perceived levels of EI and commitment in the work setting. For this reason, the main aim of the present study was to examine these relationships in order to establish future lines of research and development.

Method

The present research employed a non-experimental design, in that it did not manipulate any of the study variables. It was cross-sectional, as data was collected at only a single time-point and exploratory, in its attempt to examine a little studied reality. Finally, it was descriptive-correlation, given that, at the same time as interpreting reality, it sought to identify relationships between the variables under study.

Participants and procedure

The sample was composed of a total of 42 professionals working at different child protection centres in the province of Malaga (Andalusia, Spain) as social workers. Of these, 76% were female. Participants were contacted through different professional groups. None of the participants received financial or any other type of compensation for their participation. They were informed that they would receive a report detailing their scores. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

Instruments

CaMir questionnaire - brief version (CaMir-R). This scale is used to report different representations of attachment. The present study employed the version validated in Spanish (Balluerka et al., 2011). The scale is based on individual self-evaluations about past and present experiences of attachment and family functioning. It is a broadly used instrument in both the research and clinical settings. The original questionnaire comprises a total of seven subscales: security, availability and support regarding attachment figures; concern for family; parental interference; respect for parental authority; parental permissiveness; self-sufficiency and anger towards parents and, finally, childhood trauma. In the present study, only subscales assessing the main attachment styles were used, producing an acceptable Cronbach α in the present sample. Specifically, participants responded to scales pertaining to security ($\alpha = .93$) (secure attachment), concern for family ($\alpha = .84$) and parental interference ($\alpha = .76$) (anxious attachment); self-sufficiency ($\alpha = .60$) (evasive attachment) and childhood trauma ($\alpha = .90$) (disorganised attachment), omitting subscales corresponding to respect for parental authority and parental permissiveness as these do not relate to attachment styles.

Utrecht work engagement scale (UWES). A scale designed to evaluate the commitment of workers in the work context. The present study employed a reduced version validated in Spanish (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Commitment

refers to the extent to which employees feel emotionally connected to their work, are engaged with their tasks and feel energised by their duties. It comprises a series of statements related to the three aforementioned dimensions of commitment (vitality, dedication and absorption). Respondents indicate the degree to which each presented statement reflects their experience at work. The present study reports overall scores for commitment, producing good reliability outcomes in the present sample ($\alpha = .82$).

Trait meta-mood scale (TMMS; Salovey et al., 1995). This scale was designed to evaluate the way in which individuals reflect on their emotions and is considered to be an index of perceived EI (Salovey et al., 2002). The scale is composed of three dimensions, which are rated individually. The three dimensions are emotional attention, emotional clarity and emotional repair. Emotional attention describes attention to feelings. In other words, the degree of attention paid to one's own feelings and emotional state. The clarity subscale evaluates emotional clarity, in other words, ability to discriminate and understand one's own emotions. The repair subscale examines recovery of emotional state, in other words, ability to regulate emotional state and deal with negative emotional experiences. The brief version of the TMMS validated in Spanish (Fernández-Berrocal et al., 2004) was used in the present study. Excellent Cronbach

α outcomes were produced in the present study for the three dimensions, with .90 for emotional attention, .92 for emotional clarity and .90 for emotional repair.

Statistical analysis

Firstly, descriptive statistics were calculated for all study variables. Secondly, relationships were examined between the dimensions of attachment, EI and commitment via Pearson correlations. Finally, regression analysis was performed to examine combined outcomes for a number of variables, specifically, pertaining to attachment and EI scores, and the relationship between these two variables in concert with commitment. All analyses were performed using version 24 of the statistical program IBM SPSS.

Results

Descriptive analysis

Table 1 presents descriptive outcomes, corresponding to means and standard deviations for all study variables and minimum and maximum scores. The age of participants ranged between 24 and 53 years, with an average age of 33 years ($SD = 7.79$ years). Years of work experience ranged between one and 23 years, with an average of 6.37 years ($SD = 5.99$ years). These outcomes provide a general overview of participants' demographic characteristics, in addition to attachment styles, EI and commitment levels.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics pertaining to study variables

	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Age	33.17	7.793	24.00	53.00
Experience	6.37	5.997	1.00	23.00
Security	29.48	6.029	11.00	35.00
Worry	16.33	5.480	7	28
Interference	7.21	3.287	4	18
Self-sufficiency	8.71	2.644	4	16
Trauma	7.90	4.405	5	24
Attention	3.18	0.842	1.63	4.75
Clarity	3.18	0.861	1.43	5.00
Reparation	3.24	0.730	2.13	5.00
Commitment	5.13	0.736	3.00	6.00

Correlational analysis

In Table 2, correlations between different study table can be observed. Given the sample size ($N = 42$), despite some correlations between variables being between .20 and .30, no correlation reached statistical significance and so will not be further discussed.

Firstly, with regards to sociodemographic variables, significant relationships only emerged for the variable describing years of experience which is positively correlated with age ($r = .832$; $p < .001$) and repair as measure by the TMMS ($r = .319$; $p < .05$).

With regards to attachment, a number of relationships emerged in relation to the five subscales that evaluate the four different attachment styles and all other variables examined in the present study. Firstly, security was significantly and positively associated with self-sufficiency ($r = .455$; $p < .01$), trauma ($r = .851$; $p < .001$) and the repair subscale of the TMMS ($r = .510$; $p < .001$). Secondly, an anxious attachment style, which comprises subscales corresponding to worry and interference, only revealed correlations, which were positive in nature, between interference and self-sufficiency ($r = .409$; $p < .01$) and interference and trauma ($r = .377$; $p < .05$).

With regards to self-sufficiency, which corresponds to evasive attachment, significant relationships were found with trauma ($r = .580$; $p < .001$). Finally, the trauma subscale, which refers to a disorganised attachment style, was significantly and negatively correlated with the repair subscale of the TMMS ($r = -.514$; $p < .001$).

With regards to EI, evaluated according to the TMMS, attention was found to be significantly related, in this case positively, only with clarity ($r = .454$; $p < .01$) and repair ($r = .325$; $p < .05$), whilst clarity was correlated with the repair subscale of the TMMS ($r = .650$; $p < .001$). Further, repair was significantly and positively correlated with commitment ($r = .477$; $p < .001$).

Table 2. Correlations between study variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Sex (male=0)	—												
2. Age	0.056	—											
3. Experience	-0.012	0.832 ***	—										
4. Security	0.063	0.125	0.084	—									
5. Worry	0.127	-0.010	0.153	0.244	—								
6. Interference	-0.084	-0.081	0.013	-0.253	0.141	—							
7. Self-sufficiency	-0.083	0.024	0.025	-0.455 **	-0.101	0.409 **	—						
8. Trauma	-0.102	-0.065	0.040	-0.851 ***	-0.172	0.377 *	0.580 ***	—					
9. Authority	-0.045	-0.038	0.121	0.211	0.153	-0.187	0.055	-0.095	—				
10. Attention	-0.126	-0.060	-0.032	-0.273	0.082	-0.037	0.233	0.204	0.131	—			
11. Clarity	-0.164	0.110	0.146	0.245	0.043	-0.202	-0.014	-0.233	0.165	0.454 **	—		
12. Repair	-0.165	0.267	0.319 *	0.510 ***	0.225	-0.267	-0.251	-0.514 ***	0.097	0.325 *	0.650 ***	—	
13. Commitment	-0.056	0.023	0.012	0.191	0.098	-0.136	-0.027	-0.174	-0.197	-0.001	0.202	0.477 **	—

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

Following this, two hierarchical regression models were constructed in order to examine the combined effect of these variables on the repair TMMS subscale and on commitment, respectively. In the first hierarchical regression model, years of experience was entered as a predictor in the first step. Next, the variable corresponding to a secure attachment style was entered in the second step and, finally, attention and clarity TMMS subscales were entered in the third step. Repair was entered as a criterion variable. A new secure attachment style variable was formed from the sum of secure attachment and trauma variables, given that the strong correlation ($r = .851$) found between these variables in the present study

indicated that they represented to ends of the same continuum. Outcomes presented in Table 3 demonstrate significant outcomes for the three developed models. The third model explained a total of 68% of variance in the repair subscale of the TMMS. Specifically, experience accounted for 10% of total explained variance, secure attachment explained 28%, and attention and clarity TMMS subscales explained 30%. As can be seen in Table 4, in the third and final model, the four predictive variables had a significant influence on the repair TMMS subscale, with the greatest regression weight being produced for secure attachment ($\beta = 0.515$, $t = 4.698$, $p < .001$).

Table 3. Total explained variance for multiple regression models revealing the effect of experience, secure attachment style, attention and clarity, as measured by the TMMS, on the repair TMMS subscale

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate	Change statistics				
					R square change	F change	df1	df2	Sig. F change
1	.319 ^a	.102	.079	.82623	.102	4.532	1	40	.039
2	.615 ^b	.378	.346	.69610	.277	17.353	1	39	.000
3	.826 ^c	.682	.647	.51153	.303	17.611	2	37	.000

a. Predictor: (Constant), experience

b. Predictors: (Constant), experience, secure attachment style

c. Predictors: (Constant), experience, secure attachment style, attention and clarity measured via the TMMS

Table 4. Multiple regression models and coefficients for the effect of experience, secure attachment style, attention and clarity, as measured by the TMMS, on the repair TMMS subscale

Model		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardised coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	2.885	.187		15.414	.000
	experience	.046	.022	.319	2.129	.039
2	(Constant)	2.902	.158		18.398	.000
	experience	.043	.018	.300	2.378	.022
	secure attachment style	.453	.109	.526	4.166	.000
3	(Constant)	.640	.400		1.600	.118
	experience	.037	.014	.260	2.755	.009
	secure attachment style	.443	.091	.515	4.869	.000
	TMMS attention	.310	.118	.304	2.630	.012
	TMMS clarity	.406	.138	.344	2.942	.006

Dependent variable: TMMS repair

In the second hierarchical regression model, secure attachment style was entered as a predictor in the first step and, following this, repair, as measured by the TMMS, was entered in the second step. Commitment was entered as a criterion variable. Outcomes presented in Table 5 reveal that only the second model made a significant contribution towards explaining commitment (23% of total

explained variance). Specifically, the TMMS repair subscale explained 20% of this variable, whilst secure attachment explained 3%, although it is important to highlight that this latter increase was not significant. As indicated in Table 6, in model two, the only significant predictor of commitment was the TMMS repair subscale ($\beta = 0.526$, $t = 3.166$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 5. Explained variance of multiple regression models defining the influence of secure attachment styles and the TMMS repair subscale on commitment

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate	Change statistics				
					R square change	F change	df1	df2	Sig. F change
1	.190 ^a	.036	.012	.73153	.036	1.506	1	40	.227
2	.483 ^b	.233	.194	.66077	.197	10.026	1	39	.003

a. Predictor: (Constant), secure attachment style

b. Predictors: (Constant), secure attachment style, TMMS repair

Table 6. Multiple regression models and coefficients defining the effect of secure attachment style and repair, as measured by the TMMS, on commitment.

Model		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardised coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	5.127	.113		45.421	.000
	secure attachment style	.140	.114	.190	1.227	.227
2	(Constant)	3.698	.463		7.993	.000
	secure attachment style	-.068	.122	-.092	-.554	.583
	TMMS repair	.450	.142	.526	3.166	.003

Dependent variable: Commitment

Discussion

The present study explored existing relationships between the attachment structures inherent to social workers working with minors and self-perceived EI and the impact of this on commitment in the work setting. Next, the most relevant relationships to the study aims, introduced above, are discussed in greater detail.

With regards to sociodemographic variables, the age of social workers was significantly positively related with experience, which indicates that older social

workers tended to count on more years of experience in the profession. Nonetheless, the most notable outcome uncovered pertaining to professional experience was that a significant positive correlation emerged with emotional repair. This indicates that workers with greater professional experience were better able to manage and regulate their emotions. This coincides with findings reported in previous research which revealed that higher education and greater professional experience enables individuals to perceive, understand and predict their emotions, increasing their capacity for both personal and social regulation (Cabello et

al., 2014; Gutiérrez-Cobo et al., 2021; Navarro-Bravo et al., 2019).

With regards to attachment styles, the secure attachment style was found to correlate positively with the TMMS repair subscale, whilst, in contrast, trauma, which reflects disorganised attachment, was negatively correlated with emotional repair. These outcomes were confirmed through later analysis which unified these two styles as two ends of the same continuum denominated in the present study as secure attachment. This analysis revealed that, even after controlling for professional experience and the attention and clarity subscales of the TMMS, this combined variable explained 20% of variance in emotional repair. These findings concur with those reported in a meta-analysis performed by Walker et al. (2022) which found EI to be related with both secure and insecure attachment. Present findings indicate that development of secure attachment during childhood has a positive and direct influence on an adult's ability to manage their emotions and feelings. In the same way, it seems that social workers working with minors with a disorganised attachment style perceive themselves to be lacking in the ability to manage, change and maintain their emotions or reduce/increase the intensity of their emotions as a function of the situation. Such perceptions may stand in the way of the ability to understand and manage personal and professional situations, which entails the ability to manage personal emotions and those of others (Cabello & Fernández-Berrocal, 2015; Formento-Torres et al., 2022; Losada-Puente et al., 2022; Mayer et al., 2016; Salguero et al., 2012; Walker et al., 2022).

The present study did not identify any significant direct relationship with commitment. A systematic review performed by West (2015) examined the relationship between attachment styles and work wellbeing in professional working in social settings. This review revealed associations between secure and anxious attachment styles and efficacy and burnout in social workers. The small sample size and indicators used to assess the work

wellbeing of professionals may have led to present outcomes not coinciding with those reported in previous research. Future studies with social workers working with minors should strive to replicate present outcomes in order to establish more robust conclusions.

Emotional repair, as measured by the TMMS, was significantly and positively correlated with commitment, even after controlling for the indirect effects of secure attachment style. This finding coincides with those reported in previous research and indicates that social workers working with minors with greater abilities to intelligently manage their emotions when faced with different situations in their work setting are more committed to their job and the different duties required of them at work (Joseph et al., 2015; Joseph & Newman, 2010; Miao et al., 2017; O'Boyle et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2022).

Limitations and future lines of research

The present study reveals existing associations between attachment, EI and commitment. The exploratory aim set by the present study served to examine the way in which attachment and EI influence work wellbeing in social education professional working with minors. Whilst the present study is exploratory in nature, attention must be given to the limitations of the present study.

Firstly, the sample size is small given that the study population is highly specific and it is difficult to access large numbers. For this reason, future studies should strive to recruit larger samples of professionals from other Andalusian regions. This would enable confirmation of present findings, exploration of trends observed in the correlations produced and, at the same time, performance of more complex statistical analysis (e.g., moderation and mediation analysis) in order to explore potential direct and indirect relationships between study variables, namely, attachment, EI and work commitment.

Secondly, the measurement instruments employed were all self-report tools. This entails a degree of bias when determining

levels of competences for some of the examined variables, for example, EI.

Finally, in connection with the aforementioned limitation, it would be highly useful if a measure were available to examine satisfaction in the children under the care of participating social workers. In this way, the influence of different types of attachment inherent to social workers on the performance of social care duties with minors and their subsequent evolution throughout life should be observed. This is important given that the minors cared for by these centres come with completely destroyed social structures and feelings and they strive to achieve good emotional management by working on EI and forming, as far as possible, secure attachment to the professionals charged with educating them.

Conclusion

Findings of the present study indicate that the attachment structures formed during childhood in surveyed social workers working with minors do not appear to have a direct impact on their commitment towards performing their work duties with the minors at risk of exclusion with whom they work. Nonetheless, evidence was produced of a significant association between attachment structures and emotional repair, indicating that professionals with secure attachment perceive themselves to have high ability to manage their emotions. At the same time, this emotional competence was positively related with greater commitment to performance of work tasks.

Present findings suggest that, whilst attachment style does not have a direct impact on work commitment, its indirect influence through EI highlights the importance of developing emotional support strategies and training programs that target emotional competencies in order to improve health and work wellbeing in social workers, generally, and those working with minors, specifically (Brackett et al., 2019; Cabello et al., 2016; Castillo-Gualda et al., 2018). In many cases, these professionals become the main attachment figures and role models for the

minors under their care. It is, therefore, imperative to provide them with the support and training needed for them to effectively perform this role. By strengthening their emotional abilities and capacity to establish strong affective links with minors, environments are established that are more conducive towards supporting their comprehensive development and promoting their emotional and social wellbeing.

Acknowledgements

This work has been supported by the Regional Ministry of Economy and Knowledge, Junta de Andalucía (CTS-578) and by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (PID2021-127008OA-I00) to Rosario Cabello.

We are especially grateful to the social educators working in the youth centres of Malaga who have collaborated to carry out this work.

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Conflict of interest statement: The author state that they have no conflicts of interest in writing the present article.

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Conflict of interest statement: The author state that they have no conflicts of interest in writing the present article.

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Author contribution: JCV participated in data collection and provided input to the first draft. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of interest statement: The author state that they have no conflicts of interest in writing the present article.

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Author contribution: PFB carried out the data analysis and interpretation. He co-wrote the final draft with RC. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of interest statement: The author state that they have no conflicts of interest in writing the present article.



Revista ELectrónica de Investigación y EValuación Educativa
E-Journal of Educational Research, Assessment and Evaluation

[ISSN: 1134-4032]



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