



Preadolescents' psychosocial functioning: The role of personality and attachment style

Constantinos M. Kokkinos*, Eirini Kipritsi, Angelos Markos

Department of Primary Education, School of Education Sciences, Democritus University of Thrace, Greece

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Personality
Attachment, psychopathology
Preadolescents
SDQ

ABSTRACT

The study investigated the associations among personality (Big Five model), attachment and psychosocial functioning in a nonclinical sample of 323 Greek preadolescents. Results indicated that positive personality traits were negatively associated with psychopathological symptoms, and positively with prosocial behavior. Perceived attachment moderated the relationship between openness and conduct problems, where the negative effect of openness on conduct problems was more pronounced for insecurely attached preadolescents. Finally, extraversion moderated the relationship between perceived attachment and conduct problems, thus acting as a protective factor to the conduct problems of insecure preadolescents. Results are discussed for their practical implications.

1. Introduction

A growing body of research in preadolescents' psychosocial functioning stresses the role of intra and interpersonal factors, such as personality and attachment. However, despite the potentially important theoretical links between preadolescents' psychosocial functioning, personality traits, and attachment style, these have not been broadly investigated. This study aims to explore the role of personality and attachment style in psychosocial functioning by testing two moderation mechanisms. The rationale of the study draws upon the belief that a child's personality structure and early attachment experiences are associated with a range of behavioral outcomes.

Research in the field of personality has systematically confirmed the existence of a five-factor structure (the so-called "Big Five") comprehensively describing personality (Ehrler, Evans, & McGhee, 1999). The Five-Factor Model of Personality (FFM) includes five distinct traits of personal and motivational styles: *agreeableness*, reflecting concern and sensitivity towards others and their needs, *emotional instability or neuroticism*, reflecting to a proneness to experience feelings of anxiety, depression, discontent and anger, *extraversion*, referring to aspects such as activity, enthusiasm, assertiveness and self-confidence, *conscientiousness*, dealing with dependability, orderliness, precision and the fulfilling of commitments, and *openness to experience*, relating to intellectual functioning, creativity, imagination and social and cultural interest (Muris, Meesters, & Diederer, 2005).

The FFM has traditionally been used in research assessing the personality of adults and has proven robust (e.g., McCrae & Costa,

1990) across factor analytic techniques, rating procedures, and languages. Yet, the assessment of children's personality through self-report has generally been avoided and most studies exploring personality structure in middle childhood and early adolescence are based on parental, teacher and peer descriptions (e.g., Mervielde & De Fruyt, 2000), although research has demonstrated children's competence in describing themselves using well established personality traits (e.g., Barbaranelli, Fida, Paciello, Di Giunta, & Caprara, 2008; Kokkinos & Markos, 2015; Kokkinos, Panayiotou, Charalambous, Antoniadou, & Davazoglou, 2010).

Individual differences in personality seem to have a long-term continuity from early childhood to adolescence (Abe, 2005) with the existing evidence indicating that personality characteristics are associated with adaptive (Shiner, Masten, & Roberts, 2003) or maladaptive behavior (Caspi et al., 2003) over time. Indeed, it has been demonstrated that the broad traits encompassed in the FFM are useful predictors of important developmental outcomes, including psychosocial adjustment, academic achievement, risk behaviors, and psychopathology in middle childhood and early adolescence (e.g., Jensen-Campbell et al., 2002). Thus, child psychopathology is assumed to appear early (Frick, Cornell, Barry, Bodin, & Dane, 2003) and lead children to the experience of stable patterns of externalizing or internalizing forms of behavior (De Clercq, Van Leeuwen, De Fruyt, Van Hiel, & Mervielde, 2008). Several studies have demonstrated the association of externalizing maladaptive behavior to low conscientiousness, low agreeableness and high extraversion and emotional instability personality traits (e.g., Tackett, 2006; Van Leeuwen,

* Correspondence to: Department of Primary Education, Democritus University of Thrace, N. Hili, GR 68100 Alexandroupolis, Greece.
E-mail address: kkokkino@eled.duth.gr (C.M. Kokkinos).

Mervielde, Braet, & \$2 Bosmans, 2004), while child and early adolescent internalizing problems have been significantly associated with high emotional instability and low extraversion (Griffith et al., 2010; Van Leeuwen et al., 2004). Furthermore, anxiety and depression have been found to bear linkages with a combination of high emotional instability and low conscientiousness (Lonigan, Vasey, Philips, & \$2 Hazen, 2004). Using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 2001), a brief measure covering the most important domains of child psychopathology, Muris et al. (2005) found that extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness were all positively linked to prosocial behavior; agreeableness and conscientiousness were negatively associated with conduct problems and hyperactivity-inattention, whereas emotional instability was positively correlated with all difficulties and mainly with emotional problems in young adolescents.

Another factor with an important life-long role in an individual's psychosocial functioning is attachment style, since parenting styles or behaviors that lead to attachment patterns have been frequently associated with the development of child psychopathology (e.g., Nigg, 2006; Rothbart & \$2 Bates, 2006). Attachment theory and research claims that children develop secure or insecure patterns of close relationships with caregiving figures, typically with parents and caregivers, depending on their earliest experiences - in terms of separation, distress and reunion (Mikulincer & \$2 Shaver, 2007). Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) empirically revealed three patterns of attachment - secure, anxious/ambivalent and avoidant, with the latter two indicating insecure attachment. Later on, Main and Solomon (1990) added a fourth category, that of disorganized-disoriented attachment, in which no predictable or effective pattern of eliciting care-giving behaviors is performed by infants.

Bowlby (1988) claimed that these relationships function as internal working models (IWM) of the self and the other, and form the basis for future close relationships through childhood and adolescence into later adulthood (Kokkinos, 2007, 2013). Attachment style has been associated with children and early adolescent psychopathology (e.g., Kokkinos, 2007; Muris, Meesters, & \$2 van Den Berg, 2003) as it accounts for psychosocial factors associated with major depressive disorder (Hammen et al., 1995) and anxiety disorders (Eng, Coles, Heimberg, & \$2 Safren, 2001). Early insecure attachment is strongly related to individual differences in dependency throughout the juvenile years (Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & \$2 Collins, 2005) with anxious/resistant attachment in infancy being the best predictor of anxiety problems in late adolescence (Warren, Huston, Egeland, & \$2 Sroufe, 1997) and a risk factor for psychopathology symptoms (Sroufe, 2005). On the other hand, avoidant and disorganized attachment styles predict conduct problems, dissociation (Carlson, 1998), as well as higher levels of externalizing problems later in middle childhood (Fearon & \$2 Belsky, 2011), since infants with such attachment patterns exhibit behavior problems in childhood (Rosenstein & \$2 Horowitz, 1996) and are more often referred for psychiatric diagnosis by late adolescence, while securely attached children report fewer externalizing and internalizing problems (e.g., Brumariu & \$2 Kerns, 2010; Fearon, Bakermans-Kranenburg, van IJzendoorn, Lapsley, & \$2 Roisman, 2010).

The above research evidence is being strengthened by a meta-analytic review (Groh, Roisman, van IJzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & \$2 Fearon, 2012) according to which insecurely attached children displayed higher levels of internalizing behaviors compared to children classified as securely attached. Specifically, children with insecure-avoidant but not resistant or disorganized pattern of attachment showed internalizing symptoms, while insecure and disorganized attachment were more strongly associated with externalizing than internalizing problems. Yet, some studies have shown that both ambivalent (Brenning, Soenens, Braet, & \$2 Bal, 2012; Brenning, Soenens, Braet, & \$2 Bosmans, 2011; Brumariu & \$2 Kerns, 2008) and avoidant insecure attachment styles are correlated

with internalizing problems.

Apart from the above research findings regarding emotional problems and symptoms of psychopathology of insecurely attached preadolescents, there are studies providing neurophysiological evidence for the relationship between attachment patterns and peer interactions. White et al. (2012) examined neural responses of emotion regulation in preadolescents and adolescents while playing a virtual ball game with unfamiliar peers: insecure-dismissing attached children showed left frontal slow-wave event-related potentials while being rejected and they did not report distress during event-related potentials. Similarly, a greater increase in N2- a neural sign measuring expectancy violations- during reunion with peers who had previously excluded them was observed in avoidant but not in secure children (White, Wu, Borelli, Mayes, & \$2 Crowley, 2013).

Moreover, in terms of prosocial behavior, a body of research has shown that attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982) offers a validated framework in which positive attachment experiences strengthen a person's sense of security (Mikulincer & \$2 Shaver, 2007), thereby leading to prosocial behavior (Van Lange, De Bruin, Otten, & \$2 Joireman, 1997) and social and emotional competence, as being expressed in subsequent relationships with peers and friends, through lesser emotional and behavioral difficulties, including externalizing and internalizing symptomatology (Sroufe, 1988). Indeed, children rated as securely attached demonstrated higher levels of social competence with peers than insecure children, as a recent meta-analytic review has confirmed (Groh et al., 2014). Interestingly, there was no differentiation between the three types of insecure attachment (avoidant, resistant and disorganized) and lower peer competence.

Attachment theory may also provide a useful rationale for understanding the environmental contributions in the development of individual differences in personality (Fraley & \$2 Shaver, 2008; Sroufe, 2005). Secure attachment serves as a healthy basis for development, while insecure may be linked with difficulties in personality development (Kerns & \$2 Brumariu, 2016). Links between attachment and specific dimensions of the FFM can be theoretically substantiated, especially with regards to attachment security, since it is associated with a positive view of the self as a worthy and capable agent and of others as responsive to the self (Weinfeld, Sroufe, Egeland, & \$2 Carlson, 2008). Additionally, secure attachment is positively linked with the ability to achieve adaptive functioning in different situations (Brumariu, 2015) through the use of more constructive coping strategies (Abraham & \$2 Kerns, 2013). On the other hand, insecure attachment, and specifically anxious attachment, is positively associated with emotional instability (Wearden, Perryman, & \$2 Ward, 2006).

Indeed, studies with adult samples (e.g., Bäckström & \$2 Holmes, 2001; Nofle & \$2 Shaver, 2006) found that insecure attachment styles, as attachment anxiety, were strongly positively correlated with emotional instability (i.e. neuroticism), whereas attachment avoidance negatively correlated with agreeableness. Both insecure attachment styles were negatively correlated with extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, and modestly negatively with openness. On the other hand, secure attachment style was positively associated with extraversion and negatively with emotional instability. The relatively few studies examining this relationship in childhood and adolescence similarly found that attachment security in infancy was positively related to extraversion and openness, and negatively to emotional instability in middle childhood (Hagekull & \$2 Bohlin, 2003). Regarding the latter personality factor and in accordance with the above results, a number of studies examining children in middle childhood showed that securely attached girls experience more positive and less negative emotions in daily interactions (Abraham & \$2 Kerns, 2013); that securely attached children report more positive and less negative daily mood (Kerns, Abraham, Schlegelmilch, & \$2 Morgan, 2007) than insecurely attached children, and that securely attached children as infants managed intense emotions better than disorganized

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4932490>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4932490>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)