

Article

Anxiety and Avoidance in Attachment as Predictors of Emotional Regulation Difficulties in University Students

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Abstract: The high prevalence of anxiety and depressive symptoms in youngsters has resulted in two thirds of mental health problems emerging before the age of 25. In this context, various studies have indicated that attachment styles and emotional regulation are relevant factors for the health of this population. Likewise, a close relationship has been established between both constructs, associating secure attachment with greater regulatory skills and a lower risk of mental health problems. However, in Chile there are no studies that specifically analyze the influence of anxiety and attachment avoidance on emotional regulation, nor the influence of other factors such as biological sex. Therefore, the main purpose of this research was to analyze how these variables interact with each other. For this purpose, the Experience in Close Relationships Scale (ECR-R) and the Difficulties in Emotional Regulation Scale (DERS-E) were applied to a sample of 557 Chilean university students. The analysis of results, based on the construction of a moderated mediation model, revealed that anxiety and avoidance are predictors of emotional regulation difficulties. However, the influence of anxiety on emotional regulation would be greater than that of avoidance and would be moderated by biological sex, showing the need to design differentiated interventions for men and women.

Keywords: attachment; emotional regulation; anxiety; avoidance; mental health; young people



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1. Introduction

The importance of emotional regulation and attachment style as protective factors for the mental health of young people has led to an increase in interest in delving deeper into both constructs, especially due to the problems that negatively impact their personal, social and academic well-being [1–6]. Thus, it has been revealed that around 66% of mental health problems arise before the age of 25 [7].

In this context, Chile is not an exception [8,9]. Thus, the First National Survey of University Mental Health in Chile indicated that 46% of university students present with symptoms of anxiety and depression, while 54% suffer from stress [8]. Additionally, the National Youth Institute has found that 26.9% of Chilean youth present with moderate or severe symptoms of mental health problems, exceeding the symptoms present in the adult population [10].

Thus, young people would be one of the most vulnerable and susceptible populations to mental illness, a fact that has been associated with the fact that, at this stage of development (emerging adulthood), they would be more exposed to sources of stress and high emotional demand because of the constant and diverse changes in cognitive, biological, social and family functioning [11–16].

Emotional regulation is considered the basis of physical and mental health in young people, being a fundamental ability to adequately deal with new, stressful or emotionally charged situations [4,17]. Thus, various authors point out that emotional regulation difficulties would be a key risk factor in the development of anxious and depressive symptoms

both during adolescence and in youth [5,18]. Additionally, it has been revealed that people with emotional regulation difficulties have a lower probability of preventing anxiety disorders and adequately dealing with stressful situations [19], and/or psychopathological symptoms, especially in the child–youth population [20–26].

In contrast to the above, it has been documented that adequate emotional regulation processes achieve a significant reduction in anxiety and depressive symptoms, as well as suicidal behaviors [5,19,27–30].

In relation to attachment in adults, it has been established that anxiety (fear of rejection or abandonment) and avoidance (discomfort with the closeness or dependence on others) would form the basis of the four attachment styles: secure (low anxiety and low avoidance), anxious (high anxiety and low avoidance), avoidant (low anxiety and high avoidance) and disorganized (high anxiety and high avoidance) [31]. In this regard, it has been pointed out that this would be another relevant factor for mental health [3,31–33], gaining great importance for the preventive treatment of anxious, depressive symptoms and stress.

Additionally, it has been found that attachment security, defined as a subject's confidence in being worthy, cared for and loved by an attachment figure who will respond and provide support when required, would be a protective factor for people's mental health [33–37].

The association between attachment and emotional regulation focuses on how attachment styles influence people's capacity to manage and express their emotions. Thus, several authors have pointed out that people with secure attachment tend to use more effective emotional regulation strategies in threatening situations. Additionally, those with insecure attachment, characterized by high levels of anxiety (fear of rejection or abandonment) and avoidance (discomfort with closeness or dependence on others) would tend to experience difficulties in emotional regulation. Therefore, they would resort to less adaptive emotional regulation strategies in stressful situations as a result of the high levels of anxiety and stress they have experienced since childhood, becoming a risk factor for psychopathology [3,31,36,38–41].

It has been mentioned that a key aspect for understanding the link between both constructs would be that all people, when faced with physical or psychological threats, would activate their attachment system, resorting to internal representations of their childhood attachment figures, or their current attachment figures to regulate their emotions [32,33,35,42,43].

On the other hand, it has been indicated that differences have been found in emotional regulation skills and attachment style depending on the biological sex of the subjects. Thus, it has been pointed out that women would have more difficulties in emotional regulation compared to men, as well as attachment styles with higher levels of anxiety [44–47].

Differences in emotional regulation would be associated with women being more prone to rumination (unwanted repetitive thinking that makes it difficult to manage and control negative emotional states) has been associated with depressive and anxiety symptoms [48,49].

Distinctions in attachment styles associated with the biological sex of the subjects would be present because women experience more anxiety symptoms than men, but also on evolutionary and cross-cultural aspects, with greater differences being observed between the attachment of men and women in Western countries than in Eastern countries [50].

Finally, it should be noted that in Chile the only recent research in the university population established the relationship between emotional regulation difficulties and attachment, finding that young people showed differences in their emotional regulation difficulties based on attachment styles [51], however, the study did not consider the influence of other variables.

Despite the association found between attachment styles and emotional regulation, few studies have focused on analyzing the separate and joint influence of anxiety and avoidance (characteristics of insecure attachments) on emotional regulation and whether their influence is affected by other variables such as sex.

Considering the importance that both variables have on mental health, more specific research is required which studies the influence and interactions between both factors to understand in depth the functioning of both and the influence they can have on the young population. This is in order to design effective prevention and intervention measures relevant to men and women.

In this context, this research will use the dimensional and categorical approach to attachment. On the one hand, the dimensional approach supports the theoretical basis of the association between attachment and emotional regulation difficulties. On the other hand, the categorical approach allows a broader perspective on the relationship of attachment to emotional regulation. Thus, not only the possible individual relationships of attachment anxiety and avoidance with emotional regulation difficulties will be assessed, but also their interaction.

Thus, the main objectives of this study are (i) to examine the prevalence of difficulties in emotional regulation in young college students, (ii) to analyze the prevalence of attachment styles in young college students and (iii) to study the influence of anxious and avoidant attachment styles on emotional regulation in young adults.

Considering this, the following hypotheses were raised:

H1. *Attachment styles are related to difficulties in emotional regulation in young university students.*

H2. *There are differences in the influence of anxious and avoidant attachment styles on emotional regulation according to the sex of the young people.*

H3. *Anxious attachment is a key predictor of difficulties in emotional regulation in young university students.*

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Sample

The sample consisted of 557 participants, of which 386 were women (69.2%) and 171 were men (30.7%), whose ages ranged from 18 to 29 years ($M = 21.62$; $SD = 2.44$). To determine the sample size required for this study, it was calculated using the recommendations of the G*power 3.1 software; statistical power = 80%; effect size = 0.02; $\alpha = 0.05$ [52,53]. In this way, it was determined that the minimum sample size recommended by this software was 395 participants. However, this suggested figure was finally exceeded, also increasing the confidence level of the study.

The sample was selected in three stages. In the first stage, the Catholic University of Temuco was chosen based on the objectives of the research and the age characteristics of the population, ending with the request for permission to apply the questionnaires and explain the characteristics of the research. Subsequently, in the next stage, some classes from different careers and grades were randomly selected. Investigators went to each class to ask for voluntary participation and obtain informed consent, guaranteeing participants' anonymity, then collectively applying the questionnaires. The third stage consisted of establishing the final sample, applying as a criterion the inclusion of participants considering those students aged 29 years or less.

2.2. Instruments

The participating youth completed a socio-demographic questionnaire, the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (ECR-R) and the Difficulties in Emotional Regulation Scale (DERS-E).

2.2.1. Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (ECR-R)

The ECR-R administered for this study is a self-report survey that consists of 36 items grouped into two Likert-type scales with 7 anchor points, where: 1 = totally disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = somewhat disagree; 4 = neither agree nor disagree; 5 = somewhat agree; 6 = agree; and 7 = totally agree.

The instrument was validated for the Spanish population, obtaining factors that explain 34.65% of the variance (avoidance 18.9% and anxiety 15.7%). Cronbach's alpha was 0.87 and 0.85 for each scale (avoidance and anxiety, respectively) [54].

The ECR-R allows us to establish 4 adult attachment styles according to the levels of avoidance and anxiety: secure attachment; preoccupied; avoidant; and disorganized [54]. To do this, subjects' scores on each scale (anxiety and avoidance) are initially calculated separately, allowing each person to receive a score on both dimensions. Next, 50th percentiles were calculated for each scale, differentiating between males and females. Thus, from these cut-off values it is possible to determine high or low levels of anxiety and avoidance, allowing the sample to be categorized.

2.2.2. Difficulties in Emotional Regulation Scale (DERS-E)

This instrument is the Spanish version of the Difficulties in Emotional Regulation Scale (DERS), developed by Gratz and Roemer in 2004, and consists of a self-report questionnaire that allows the assessment of difficulties in emotional regulation.

The scale used in the questionnaire is a Likert-type scale with five anchor points, where 1 corresponds to "almost never" and 5 to "almost always"; where higher scores are indicative of a greater degree of difficulty in emotional regulation [55].

It should be noted the validity of the survey in the Chilean population is present with adequate psychometric properties, with an instrument reliability of $\alpha = 0.91$ and $\omega = 0.92$. In addition, a cut-off score of 73 points has been established for this population, allowing differentiation between those with high and low emotional regulation difficulties, being applicable to different types of samples, since no differences were detected for emotional regulation difficulties between men and women or by sexual orientation [56].

2.3. Procedure

The Bioethics and Biosafety Committee of the University of Extremadura (Spain) (Ref. 95/2023) reviewed and approved both the objectives of the research, procedures, instruments and techniques used prior to the distribution of the questionnaires. Then, authorization was obtained from the Chilean university where the research was carried out (Universidad Católica de Temuco), and subsequently, potential participants received information about the main characteristics of the study and the procedures implemented to ensure the confidentiality and discretion of their responses, together with the voluntary nature of their participation in the study.

After obtaining the informed consent of the participants, the investigators personally attended each class on the date and time established for the purpose of administering the questionnaires. At that time, a QR code and a link were shared to complete the forms that were administered through the Google Forms platform, which allowed the information to be collected and organized fast and without difficulty, permitting the completion of the forms through their mobile phones or laptops. It should also be noted that the researchers were present while the young people filled in the different forms in order to clear up any possible questions. However, to avoid bias, they remained seated in the room, so that they could not see the answers given by the participants.

2.4. Data Analysis

To get the sample, an initial analysis of participants was carried out. This way, the analysis allowed us to identify university students up to 29 years old. Subsequently, all the analyses were carried out with the statistical package IBM SPSS v. 24, where the sex variable was coded by assigning a value of 1 for men and 2 for women. Thus, the statistical analyses of the study consisted of the calculation of the mean, standard deviation and Spearman's correlation coefficient.

Then, the chi-square test was performed, as well as Cramer's V statistic to measure the strength of the association between the variables under study.

Finally, using Process Model 2 V3.3 (Figure 1), a moderated mediation analysis was conducted to determine in what way the relationship between attachment anxiety and difficulties in emotional regulation (D.E.R.) is affected by attachment avoidance and sex (moderator variables) [57].

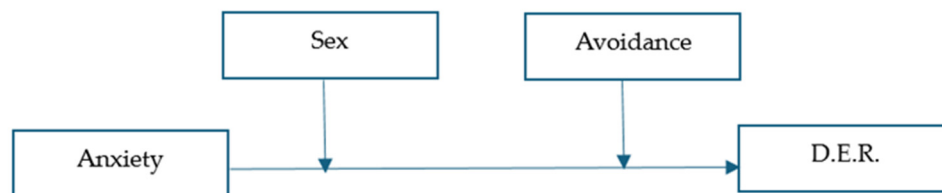


Figure 1. Moderated mediation model 2.

It should be noted that “Process” is a macro for use in SPSS that, through least squares regression, analyzes the importance and size of direct and indirect effects in mediation models. This type of analysis is valid for linear regression models in which the variables do not meet the assumptions of normality, since the variables are not required to be normally distributed to estimate the indirect effects. Thus, “Process” uses nonparametric techniques such as the bootstrap method, which generates an empirical representation of the sampling distribution of the indirect effects by performing multiple resamples of the data. This allows for more precise and robust confidence intervals for the indirect effects, which increases the reliability of the results [58].

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive Statistics

Starting with the descriptive analyses, the results indicate that 49.1% of the total sample has difficulties regulating their emotions. Likewise, it is revealed that, according to the sex of the participants, 55% of women have difficulties in emotional regulation compared to 36% of men.

Additionally, the descriptive analysis of the attachment style of the subjects surveyed revealed that 72.18% of the sample presents with insecure attachment and 27.82% secure attachment. Complementarily, the analysis allowed the authors to identify that the most frequent attachment style among the participants is secure attachment (27.82%), followed by disorganized attachment style (25.67%), anxious attachment (24.95%) and, lastly, avoidant attachment (21.54%).

On the other hand, the analysis by sex showed that men have a secure attachment style to a greater extent (33.9%) than women (25.1%). Furthermore, the results show that women are more likely to identify with disorganized, anxious and avoidant attachment styles (Table 1).

Table 1. Prevalence of attachment styles differentiated by sex.

Attachment Styles	Men	Woman
Secure	33.91%	25.12%
Anxious	23.39%	25.64%
Avoidant	20.46%	22.02%
Disorganized	22.22%	27.20%

Prepared by the authors.

In terms of the predominance of attachment styles in people with difficulty controlling their emotions, the results reveal that these subjects mostly present with disorganized and anxious attachment styles, both of which are distinguished by high levels of anxiety (Table 2).

Table 2. Prevalence of attachment styles and difficulties in emotional regulation.

Attachment Styles	Difficulties in Emotional Regulation
Secure	12.77%
Anxious	31.75%
Avoidant	17.15%
Disorganized	38.32%

Prepared by the authors.

3.2. Association Analysis

The association analysis revealed a statistically significant association between attachment styles and difficulties in emotional regulation (D.E.R.) ($\chi^2 = 345.378$; $p < 0.01$), and the strength of the association, measured by Cramer's V coefficient, was found to be moderate ($V = 0.455$; $p < 0.01$). Additionally, the analysis of the correlation matrix (Table 3) revealed a moderate to strong positive correlation between difficulties in emotional regulation and anxiety. Therefore, the higher the levels of anxiety, the greater the difficulties young people have in regulating their emotions. Likewise, the results show a positive correlation between difficulties in emotional regulation and avoidance, as well as between emotional regulation difficulties and sex. Finally, a correlation is also found between the sex of the participants and the degree of anxiety they show. However, there is no significant correlation between sex and avoidance.

Table 3. Spearman correlations.

	1	2	3	4
D.E.R.	-			
Sex	0.189 **	-		
Avoidance	0.163 **	0.043	-	
Anxiety	0.537 **	0.129 **	0.083	-

Note. 1 = difficulties in emotional regulation; 2 = sex; 3 = attachment avoidance; 4 = attachment anxiety; ** $p < 0.01$.

3.3. Moderated Mediation Analysis

The study included two moderated mediation analyses with 10,000 bootstraps, taking emotional regulation difficulties as the dependent variable. The direct relationship of anxiety, avoidance and sex on the difficulties in emotional regulation (model 1) was analyzed, as well as the indirect relationship, that is, the interaction of these variables with each other (model 2), modifying their direct relationship on the difficulties in emotional regulation.

Thus, the coefficients of the moderated mediation models on emotional regulation difficulties are shown in Table 4:

Table 4. Model 2 of moderated mediation on the difficulties in emotional regulation.

	Model 1. D.E.R.		Model 2. Interactions	
	B	T	B	T
Anxiety	0.794 ***	5.76		
Avoidance	0.225 **	2.46		
Sex	14.464 ***	3.54		
Anxiety \times Avoidance			-0.001	-1.215
Anxiety \times Sex			-0.172 **	-2.680
R ²		0.32		
F		53.42		

Note. ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

The results of the model show the direct relationship of attachment anxiety on emotional regulation difficulties ($\beta = 0.7941$; $t = 5.76$; $p < 0.001$). Therefore, anxiety has a positive

and significant direct relationship on emotional regulation difficulties; that is, as attachment anxiety increases, emotional regulation difficulties also increase. The results have also shown that attachment anxiety is a predictor of difficulties in emotional regulation ($R^2 = 0.32$)

Likewise, the model indicates that, although to a lesser degree than anxiety, attachment avoidance also has a positive and direct relationship with emotional regulation difficulties ($\beta = 0.2252$; $t = 2.46$; $p < 0.01$). This indicates that a higher level of attachment avoidance is associated with an increase in emotional regulation difficulties.

Additionally, the model shows that the sex of the subjects has a significant and positive relationship with emotional regulation difficulties ($\beta = 14.46$; $t = 3.54$; $p < 0.001$). In this case, the positive relationship suggests that women are associated with greater difficulties in emotional regulation compared to men.

Furthermore, to evaluate the indirect relationship and the confidence intervals (CIs), a bootstrap procedure was used. An indirect relationship is significant if the CI does not include the value 0. Thus, for the path anxiety \rightarrow avoidance \rightarrow difficulties in emotional regulation, a non-significant indirect relationship ($\beta = 0.0017$; 95% CI $[-0.0045, 0.0011]$) was obtained. These results show that attachment avoidance does not moderate the relationship between anxiety and difficulties in emotional regulation in a statistically significant manner.

For the analysis of the anxiety \rightarrow sex \rightarrow difficulties in emotional regulation path, a significant interaction was found between anxiety and sex in the prediction of difficulties in emotional regulation ($\beta = -0.1727$; 95% CI $[-0.2993, -0.0461]$). This suggests that the relationship between anxiety and difficulties in emotional regulation varies by sex.

4. Discussion

The results of this research indicate that almost half of the young people in the sample have difficulties regulating their emotions, and differentially by sex, it is women who would present with these difficulties more frequently. These findings are consistent with research that has found a high prevalence of emotional dysregulation in young women [29,45,47], which could be associated with the greater use of rumination as a regulation strategy [44,48,49].

However, these results are controversial from the perspective of gender stereotypes. Thus, a traditional view of men and women would establish that it would be precisely the latter who should present fewer difficulties in emotional regulation [59,60].

Additionally, women would use more emotional regulation strategies than men and, in addition, they would implement them in a more flexible way, so they should present with greater emotional regulation skills. The explanation could be related to the fact that the use of a greater number of strategies does not always mean greater effectiveness in emotional regulation [61]. In this regard, it is possible that young women today, more accustomed to interacting through digital media than in person, have lost the advantage that differential socialization offered in previous times.

On the other hand, the results show the high prevalence of insecure attachment styles in young university students. These findings are consistent with studies that indicate a higher prevalence of attachments characterized by high levels of anxiety and avoidance in this population [62,63]. In addition, men present with secure attachment styles to a greater extent compared to women, who, in turn, have more insecure attachment styles associated with high levels of anxiety (anxious and disorganized attachment). Another finding showed a correlation between the sex of the participants and anxiety in attachment. In this regard, the study of attachment differences between men and women has received little attention in traditional research. However, there is growing evidence that such differences arise from middle childhood. Likewise, it has been suggested that the greatest differences in anxiety levels occur in emerging adulthood [50].

Other relevant findings established the association between attachment styles and emotional regulation difficulties, as well as a positive correlation between anxiety and attachment avoidance with emotional dysregulation, confirming our first hypothesis. Consequently, the importance of attachment security for adequate emotional regulation, espe-

cially in the face of negative emotions, would be confirmed. Similarly, insecure attachments interfere with effective regulation of emotions, affecting the mental health of young people [3,63–65].

In accordance with our second hypothesis, the findings related to the construction and analysis of a moderated mediation model reveal the influence of anxiety on attachment, and of avoidance on emotional regulation skills. These results suggest that young people who present high levels of anxiety or avoidance in attachment would have more difficulties to regulate their emotions compared to those who have secure attachment. In this sense, people with insecure attachments would present difficulties identifying and describing their emotions, as well as an interference in the development of the internal resources necessary to face stress. This would also imply difficulties in emotional regulation [3,33]. In this regard, neurobiology has revealed that the influence of anxiety and avoidance of attachment on emotional regulation difficulties would be associated with deficits in the neuronal structure of the brain regions involved in the regulation of emotions [3,66,67]. In addition to the above, the analysis of the moderated mediation model also revealed a greater influence of anxiety on emotional regulation compared to avoidance, thus confirming our third hypothesis.

These results indicate that, although both avoidance and anxiety in attachment affect emotional regulation skills, young people with anxious attachments would present with greater difficulties in regulating their emotions, compared to avoidant ones. In this regard, it has been established that avoidant subjects, unlike anxious subjects, show more skills in coping with threatening events, since they would resort to emotional disconnection, trying to block or inhibit any emotional state that is incongruent with the objective of keeping their attachment needs deactivated [3,68–70]. On the contrary, anxious subjects would tend to use rumination as a regulatory strategy when faced with a stressful situation or when they feel their attachment needs are unsatisfied, focusing intensely on how to satisfy those emotional needs. This would intensify the expression of their emotions, so they would tend to greater deregulate, compared to people with avoidant attachment, who suppress their emotional expression [71–73].

In addition, the analysis of the direct and indirect relationship through the interaction between attachment anxiety and sex shows that, while both anxiety and attachment avoidance influence emotional regulation difficulties, sex significantly moderates the impact of anxiety. This indicates that the relationship between anxiety and emotional regulation would be greater in women than in men. Therefore, young women would experience greater difficulties in regulating their emotions when they have high levels of attachment anxiety. This may be because women would experience and express their emotions more intensely than men. The explanation, again, can be based on neurobiological explanations. The hormonal differences involved with emotional sensitivity increases the emotional reactivity of women in situations of stress or anxiety [74–76]. Additionally, it is possible that, when faced with stressful situations, women use ruminative coping strategies, focusing repeatedly and excessively on negative situations or emotions, which can increase both anxiety and their difficulties in regulating emotions. Men, on the other hand, tend to use more distracting coping strategies, which can temporarily moderate the intensity of anxiety [44,48,49].

The lower effect of anxiety on emotional regulation in the men in the sample could be explained by the influence of masculinity norms in traditional parenting contexts, where men must be strong and emotionally self-controlled. Thus, many young men with anxious attachment and deep-rooted beliefs of self-sufficiency could use emotional suppression strategies, impacting their emotional expression [77–79].

Finally, the model shows that the indirect effect of the interaction between anxiety and avoidance is not significant. This finding is also relevant since it suggests that the presence of both forms of attachment insecurity (anxiety and avoidance) does not provide an additional interactive effect on emotional regulation difficulties, beyond their individual effects. However, these results contradict research that points to subjects with high levels

of anxiety and avoidance (disorganized attachment) as those who would present with more difficulties in regulating their emotions compared to those with anxious or avoidant attachment [80,81].

These findings have important practical applications, since they reveal the high prevalence of insecure attachment styles and difficulties in emotional regulation in young university students, which constitute risk factors for their physical and mental health. Similarly, the results allow us to understand the influence of attachment anxiety on avoidance as a key predictor of difficulties in emotional regulation, whose influence would be greater in the case of young women. Consequently, to prevent mental health problems suffered by young people, it would be key to design programs that allow, from early childhood, the development of differentiated emotional regulation strategies for boys and girls. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of designing and implementing workshops for young people that allow them to train, make visible and raise awareness about the importance of the attachment figure and how insecure attachments can modify the way in which both they and their future sons and daughters can express their emotions and, as a result, affect their mental health. In this way, it will be possible to encourage responsible parenting aimed at developing secure attachments in boys and girls, thus giving them a protective factor for their present and future mental health.

5. Conclusions

Today, various studies have highlighted the importance of emotional regulation and attachment styles in the mental health of young people. Moreover, there is ample evidence of the association between attachment and difficulties in regulating emotions, as well as their joint influence on mental health. However, to date, there has been no analysis of how attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance (characteristics of insecure attachment) interact both separately and together, influencing emotional regulation. Likewise, it has been pointed out that the study of attachment differences between men and women has been little researched despite the growing evidence of these differences.

Considering the above, one of the main findings of this study is the analysis of some less studied variables such as attachment anxiety, avoidance and biological sex to understand how these factors influence emotional dysregulation and impact the mental health of young people. Furthermore, this research explores the association between these factors, establishing how some of them influence others, and establishing complex explanations rather than focusing on simple, unidirectional relationships.

Thus, this research highlights the importance of attachment styles, but particularly of anxiety and avoidance, as predictive factors in emotional regulation difficulties in young people, establishing that the influence of anxiety on emotional regulation is more significant than that of avoidance. Therefore, attachment anxiety is a key factor in emotional regulation difficulties, whose influence is additionally moderated by biological sex, which possibly ends up being reflected in adolescent boys and girls through their differential socialization. In this way, the need to design specific interventions for men and women is highlighted.

These findings provide new perspectives for the development of strategies for the prevention and treatment of mental health problems, mainly in young people, a population in which it is essential to intervene since they are at a stage in their life of acquiring and subsequently consolidating patterns of behavior and coping skills.

To finish, future studies should focus on further studying the variables analyzed in this research, extending the study to children and adults with the aim of exploring the evolution of these influences over time. Likewise, it would be enriching to investigate further the possible differences in the attachment of men and women, expanding the study of this construct.

6. Limitations

This research presents some limitations that must be considered. Firstly, it is a cross-sectional study, so it is not possible to infer causality in it. This way, longitudinal studies

could provide a complementary view to our conclusions, also allowing us to observe the way in which attachment styles evolve in the different stages of human development, as well as their influence on emotional regulation difficulties.

Furthermore, the sample of this study included only college students, so the results may not be representative of all youngsters. Therefore, research that includes samples of non-university students, as well as children and adults, is recommended to broaden the generalizability of these results.

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