

## **Psychological Capital: The Role of Attachment (Case Study: Tehran Children's Hospital)**

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### **Abstract**

One of the most important issues in the field of organizational behavior studies is the identification of positive psychological resources and capacities, which considerably affect individuals' job performance. Therefore, the present research aims to study and identify the effects of attachment on psychological capital. With regard to the purpose, this research is applied and in regard to data collection method, it is descriptive/analytic and of correlational type. The analysis is carried out based on Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The study was done at Tehran Children's Hospital, in which a sample of 176 personnel filled out the questionnaire. In this research, the validity of attachment and psychological capital measurement models was evaluated by Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Also, the results of the structural model suggested the significant effect of attachment on the dimensions of psychological capital. It is noteworthy that between the two dimensions of attachment, i.e. avoidance and anxiety, avoidance is more explanatory. Finally, it is notable that attachment theory is one of the most important theories in OB/HR; this has critical consequences for variables like psychological capital.

### **Keywords**

Attachment Theory, Psychological capital, Structural Equation Modeling.

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## **Introduction**

In recent years, the introduction of positive psychology revealed that paying attention to good and positive traits in individuals is as important as paying attention to their defects and negative traits (Luthans & Youssef, 2007). Thus, organizational behavior also witnessed the appearance of concepts which had a close relationship with positive psychology, concepts such as Positive Organizational Behavior (POB), Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS), and the most recent of all, psychological capital. The purpose of introducing these concepts has been to discuss those positive aspects in the field of organizational behavior which are peculiar to workplace and have a considerable impact on individuals' job performance (Luthans and Youssef, 2007).

Positive organizational behavior (POB) is a relatively new concept in the field of organizational behavior. According to recent research, positive organizational behavior has important positive consequences for the attitudinal, behavioral, and performance variables of individuals in organizations. Various variables such as personnel well-being (Avey et al., 2010), exposure to bad news in the organization (French & Holden, 2012), work engagement (Jeung, 2011), work-life balance (Muse et al., 2008), job performance (Ramlall, 2008), and ethical behaviors (Sekerka, Comer, & Godwin, 2014) are some of the important variables that are significantly related to the variables in the field of positive organizational behavior.

What seems to be significant here is finding and explaining those psychological traits the existence or development of which can prepare the grounds for the emergence and formation of positive psychological resources in individuals and organizations.

Psychological capital is one of the most important variables in positive organizational behavior area. Psychological capital is related to some important job consequences. In particular, job burnout is one of the important variables associated with psychological capital. Job burnout as one of the occupational injuries (Zarei Matin et al., 2012), which is widespread among some occupations such as nursing, has a significant negative correlation with psychological capital. Several studies (Cheung, Tang, & Tang, 2011; Wang et al., 2012; Peng et al., 2013; Laschinger & Fida, 2014) have shown a significant negative relationship between

psychological capital and job burnout, especially among nurses. Therefore, it is important to investigate psychological capital and variables related to it in the workplace of nurses (i.e. hospitals).

Among numerous psychological concepts and variables, few traits are considered effective in the field of organizational studies and are studied. One of these variables is attachment style. As a psychological feature which an individual has from childhood and brings with himself to an organization, attachment style affects the individual's job performance and behavior at that organization (Richards & Schat, 2011). In a general perspective, attachment styles can be divided into two secure and insecure categories, where secure attachment style generally represents those positive traits which an individual possesses and help him perform his occupational duties better and more effectively.

It is worth noting that secure and insecure attachment, are two styles of attachment. While the underlying dimensions of attachment are anxiety and avoidance, combining the two with different values determines the style of attachment (Gholipour et al., 2018). The relationship between attachment and some attitudinal and behavioral variables in the organization has been the subject of several studies, including intention to leave (Dahling & Librizzi, 2015), work-related well-being (Lanciano & Zammuner, 2014), positive and negative emotional experiences in the workplace (Schusterschitz, Danay & Geser, 2018), and job satisfaction and promotion (Ronen & Zuroff, 2017).

However, in spite of the importance of studying the effect of attachment on organizational variables, especially positive organizational behavior ones, there has been no study to address this issue in the literature. Therefore, studying the relationship between attachment styles and psychological capital as a representation of positive psychological resources seems to be necessary. Thus, the effect of attachment styles on psychological capital as well as dimensions of this issue has been studied in the current research.

## **Literature Review**

### **1. Psychological Capital**

In recent years, some psychologists have noticed that psychology puts excessive emphasis on negative aspects (Luthans et al., 2007). In the late 1990s, as a result of the works of Martin Seligman, a new

movement called positive psychology emerged, the purpose of which was to shift the focus of psychology from correcting the wrongs and disorders to creating and training healthy individuals who possess positive qualities (Wright, 2003).

With the boom in positive psychology, the effects of this school on the workplace and organizational behavior were also taken into consideration (Luthans & Youssef, 2007). Consequently, under the influence of positive psychology, numerous approaches to workplace were developed and introduced, out of which one can refer to three main trends, namely positive organizational behavior, positive organizational scholarship and psychological capital (Luthans & Youssef, 2007). While positive organizational behavior deals with the issues at micro-level, positive organizational scholarship focuses on the macro-level (Luthans et al., 2007). Psychological capital also refers to positive traits in individuals which lead to their higher efficacy and thriving in their jobs (Clapp–Smith et al., 2009). The attachment has some implications for psychological health at work and home (Joplin et al., 1999) and can predict job performance as well as some personality variables (Neustadt et al., 2011).

Psychological capital construct is comprised of four dimensions, including: 1) Self-confidence (belief in self-efficacy) to make necessary efforts needed for success at doing challenging tasks (Luthans & Youssef, 2007); 2) Hope, that is, a sense of effectiveness and also having a path to achieve the goals (Luthans et al., 2004). In other words, hope means persistence in aim and, if necessary, finding new ways to achieve it (Luthans & Youssef, 2007); 3) Optimism, that is, an individual's permanent and pervasive attribution in the face of good and adverse events. It means that an optimist person considers good events as permanent and bad events as accidental and occasional (Luthans et al., 2004); and 4) Resiliency, that is, an individual's ability to return to positive conditions after facing a huge problem or a stressful situation (Luthans & Youssef, 2007).

Studies conducted on psychological capital have examined the relationship between this construct and each of its dimensions with job variables. In one of these studies, it was found out that there is a negative and significant relationship between positive psychological capital and the three variables of stress, turnover intention and searching

for another job (Avey et al., 2009). Another study also reached the conclusion that there is a positive and significant relationship between the three dimensions of hope, optimism, and resiliency with job satisfaction and work happiness and also between hope and resiliency and organizational commitment (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). Also, in another study, it was found that there is a positive and significant relationship between leaders' positive psychological capital and subordinates' trust and performance (Zamahani et al., 2011).

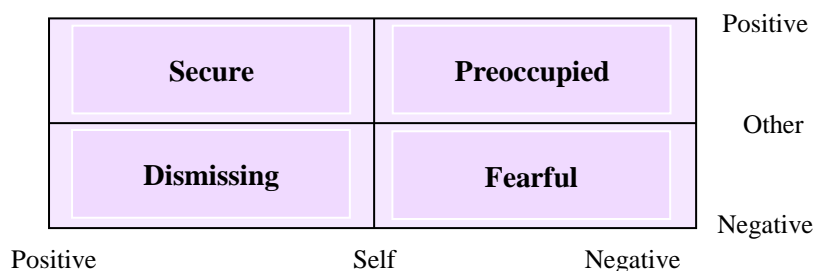
## **2. Attachment and its styles**

In recent years, attachment theory has been one of the most important and influential psychological theories which has inspired new perspectives on the wide range of topics of organizational behavior (Maysel & Popper, 2019). Recent studies show that attachment theory offers equivalent or superior predictive power than the Big Five personality theory (Hedberg & Luchak, 2018). John Bowlby considered attachment as a behavioral system in human, the purpose of which was to maintain the closeness of a child to his mother and to protect him from harm (Bowlby, 1969; Harms, 2011). Mary Ainsworth introduced the concept of security into attachment theory and was able to differentiate among three distinct attachment styles (Ainsworth, 1989). Secure attachment style was specific to children who were disturbed by mother's absence but accepted her warmly upon her return (Rholes & Simpson, 2004). Attachment experiences influence individuals over the life course and across major life and work events (Sutton, 2019). In organizational context, secure attachment contributes positively to job performance (Ronen & Zuroff, 2017). Individuals with secure attachment have more work satisfaction and positive organizational experience (Jiang, 2017). Avoidant attachment style represents the behavior of those children who due to irresponsiveness of their care-givers have tried to become emotionally independent and have become distracted from their care-givers and attracted to the environment. Due to their mothers' unstable behavior, children with anxious-ambivalent attachment style have always been anxious about this instability (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991).

Mental representation is a concept which is discussed as the basis of stability and continuity of attachment styles throughout life

(Bowlby, 1969). According to experts, over the early years of life, the child creates mental representations of the overall style of his behavior and interactions with the care-giver. The concept of mental representations makes it possible to generalize attachment styles to adults (Sroufe & Waters, 1977). Therefore, in the so-called field of adult attachment, by investigating adult attachment styles, it was attempted to examine the relationship between this variable and other psychological variables (Bartholomew & Shaver, 1998).

In one of these studies on adults attachment and based on the concept of mental representations, individuals' attachment styles were defined in a new way. In this study, based on an individual's mental representations of himself and others, each of which can be good or bad, four attachment styles were introduced as follows (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991):



**Fig. 1. The attachment styles**

It is easy for people with a secure style to approach others. It is not easy to approach others for those with a dismissing style, and they try to avoid it. The preoccupied style refers to people who are reluctant to approach others because they are worried their relatives might abandon them. The members of the fearful style are interested in close relationship with others but are afraid of approaching others because they are afraid of being rejected (Bartholomew & Shaver, 1998).

By using factor analysis in later studies, it was revealed that there are two fundamental dimensions in the concept of attachment and its styles, namely anxiety and avoidance (Brennan et al., 1998). Recently attachment styles are evaluated based on these two dimensions and via using Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (ECRS). In this research, the same method was employed.

Also some studies have been conducted on the relationship between attachment styles and organizational behavior and job variables such as leadership, trust, mentoring, employment, relationships, ethical behavior (Yip et al., 2018), organizational dyadic and group relationships, team processes and some organizational pathologies (Paetzold, 2015), some of which will be mentioned in the following lines. In the first step, the relationship between attachment styles and job was evaluated. The hypotheses of this study were that individuals with the secure attachment style have a more secure tendency towards their job, higher job satisfaction, and less job fears and performance worries. Individuals with the anxious-ambivalent attachment style prefer to work with others and are afraid of failure in their jobs. Avoidant individuals also prefer to work alone, when they are not working they get angry, and their job is performed at the cost of ruining their relationships. The results of this research confirmed the above mentioned hypotheses (Hazan & Shaver, 1990).

In another study, the relationship between attachment styles and transformational leadership was evaluated. As a result of that study, which was conducted at a military college, the existence of a positive relationship between secure attachment style and transformational leadership was confirmed (Popper et al., 2000).

In another study, the relationship between attachment styles and leaders' motivations and beliefs was evaluated. The findings of this study revealed that a leader's attachment style has a relationship with his leadership motivations, self-representation as a leader and leadership styles. Leaders with an anxious style needed personal confirmation, love and security, and uncertainty was evident in their leadership style, while avoidant leaders considered their role as an opportunity for displaying their self-confidence and superiority (Davidovitz et al., 2007).

In another study, individuals' psychological capacities for leadership in general and attachment styles in particular were examined. The hypothesis of this study, which has been presented in the form of a model, was that secure attachment style affects leadership potential, which is a latent variable and is expressed through five capacities of trait anxiety, general self-efficacy, optimism, internal locus of control and openness to experience. The results of the study confirmed this hypothesis (Popper & Amit, 2009).

In one of the most recent studies, the relationship between attachment styles and job behaviors such as support-seeking, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and turnover intention has been examined. The results of this study indicated that anxiety has a negative effect on citizenship behavior and a positive effect on support-seeking; avoidance has a relationship with support-seeking, and both anxiety and avoidance have a positive effect on turnover intention (Richards & Schat, 2011).

### **3. The relationship between attachment and psychological capital**

In numerous studies, the relationship between attachment and hope, efficacy, resiliency and optimism has been evaluated. In one study, Grunert found out that people with the secure attachment style have more hope and resiliency (Grunert, 2008). The results of another study which had been conducted on social workers suggested that the higher levels of security of attachment style have a significant relationship with resiliency (Tosone et al., 2010). Also, in another study, it was found that there is a positive and significant relationship between secure attachment and hope and trust in the workplace (Simmons et al., 2009). In one of the studies which aimed to examine the relationship between attachment styles and self-efficacy and self-disclosure, it was revealed that secure attachment has a positive and significant effect on self-efficacy (Wei et al., 2005). In another study, it was found that insecurity in attachment and excessive anxiety in attachment style have a significant relationship with the lack of self-efficacy (Mallinckrodt & Wei, 2005). Another researcher studying the relationship between attachment styles, self-confidence and optimism, confirmed a positive and significant relationship between secure attachment style and optimism (Sandoval, 2008).

Based on a comprehensive deep review of literature, the following model – as the theoretical research model – served as the basis of the current study. In this research, attachment includes the two dimensions of anxiety and avoidance; that is, individuals who get a higher score in these two have a less secure attachment. Psychological capital structure also includes dimensions of hope, efficacy, optimism and resiliency. It is noteworthy that the current research was conducted at Tehran Children's Hospital.



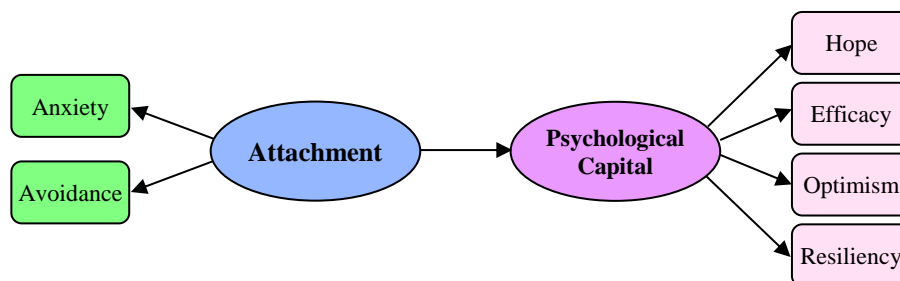


Fig. 2. The study

### Research Methodology

The purpose of the present study is to explain the causal relationships between attachment and psychological capital among the employees of a hospital in Tehran; therefore, with regard to the purpose, this study is applied and in relation to data collection method, it is descriptive/analytic and of correlational type; and it is specifically based on Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

#### 1. Research hypotheses

Taking into consideration the issues mentioned above, the hypotheses of this research have been presented as major and minor hypotheses to be studied and tested:

##### A) Primary hypothesis

Attachment has a significant effect on psychological capital.

##### B) Secondary hypotheses

Attachment has a significant effect on hope.

Attachment has a significant effect on efficacy.

Attachment has a significant effect on resiliency.

Attachment has a significant effect on optimism.

#### 2. Research tools and method

To measure the attachment styles, Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (ECRS) was used (Brennan et al., 1998). This questionnaire includes 36 questions which examine the two dimensions of avoidance and anxiety. To each dimension, 18 questions have been dedicated. The respondents answered each of the questions within the seven-point Likert scale. The reliability of this questionnaire was measured by Cronbach's alpha using SPSS software. Cronbach's

alpha for this questionnaire was found to be 0.82; this number was 0.74 for the dimension of avoidance and 0.86 for anxiety, which indicate suitable reliability rates.

Also, to measure psychological capital, PsyCap Questionnaire (PCQ) was used (Luthans et al., 2007). This questionnaire includes 24 questions in which six questions have been used for each of the dimensions of hope, efficacy, optimism and resiliency. The respondents answered the questions within the seven-point Likert scale. Reliability of this questionnaire was also measured using Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha for this questionnaire was found to be 0.87, which suggests a high rate of reliability. Also, Cronbach's alpha for the six questions referring to the dimensions of efficacy, hope, optimism and resiliency were obtained as 0.88, 0.72, 0.72 and 0.71, respectively. In order to measure the validity of this questionnaire, factor analysis was used, the result of which are as follows.

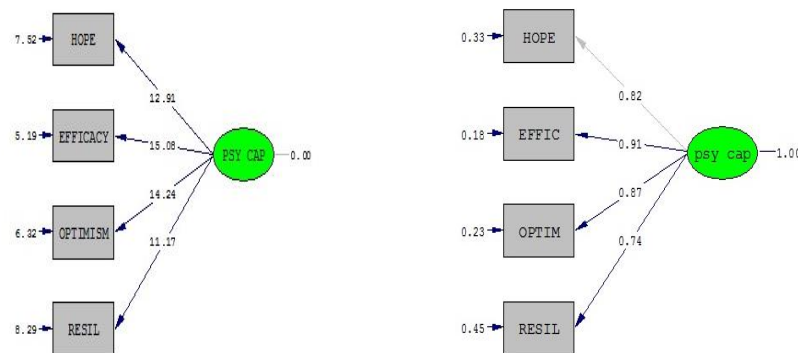


Fig. 3. The results of factor analysis

### 3. Population and sampling method

With regard to the behavioral and individual research variables, i.e. various attachment styles and psychological capital, the research population used in this research was comprised of all the employees of a hospital in Tehran. Based on the formula for sampling from a limited population and using a random sampling method, a sample of 188 people was selected. Finally, a total of 176 questionnaires were filled out and returned.

## Data Analysis

### 1. Descriptive statistics

In the study at hand, 63% of the respondents were female and 37% were male. Also, 61% of the respondents were married and 39% were single. Besides, 42% of the respondents were younger than 30, 33% were between 30 and 40, 22% were between 40 and 50, and 3% were older than 50. In regard to educational level, 16% of the respondents had a high school diploma or a lower degree, 6% had an associate degree, 62% had a BA, 4% had an MA, and 12% had a Ph.D. Also, attachment style of the people in the statistical sample is as presented in the table below.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics**

Gender	63% Female		42% Male		
Marital Status	61% Married			39% Single	
Age	42% Younger than 30	33% between 30 and 40	22% between 40 and 50	3% Older than 50	
Educational Level	16% Diploma	6% Associate	62% BA	4% MA	12% PhD

### 2. Inferential statistics

#### A) Major hypothesis test

In order to test the major hypothesis of this research, i.e. the relationship between attachment and psychological capital, structural equation modeling (SEM) was used. The hypotheses are as follows:

$H_0$ : Attachment has a significant effect on psychological capital.

$H_1$ : Attachment does not have a significant effect on psychological capital.

**Table 2. Correlation between attachment and PsyCap**

	PsyCap
Attachment	-0.86

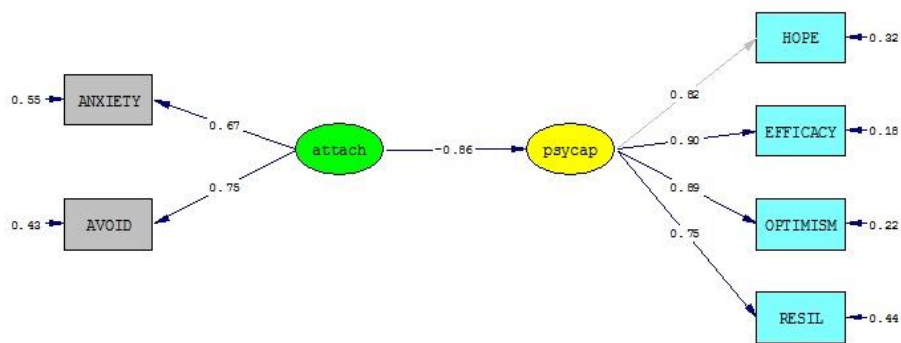
N=176

Considering the significant relationship between these two, it is obvious that the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative

hypothesis is confirmed; therefore, it can be said that attachment has a significant effect on psychological capital.

### B) Minor hypotheses test

In the next phase of the research, in order to study the effects of attachment on psychological capital and its dimensions, structural equation modeling was used, the results of which are as follows.



**Fig. 4. The SEM results between attachment and psychological capital**

As inferred from the results of the foregoing structural equation modeling, attachment has a negative and significant effect value of 0.86 on psychological capital. Out of the two dimensions of attachment, i.e. avoidance and anxiety, avoidance is a more explanatory dimension, and out of psychological capital dimensions, efficacy has the highest percentage of explanation. Concerning fitness indices, this model is in a suitable condition, because  $X^2/df$  ratio equals 0.947 and is less than 2, the value of RMSEA equals 0.00 and is less than 0.05, the value of GFI equals 0.99, AGFI equals 0.97, and NFI equals 0.92; all of these are more than 0.9. Also, the null hypothesis of this test indicates suitable fitness of the model. Considering the value of  $P=0.4752$ , the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

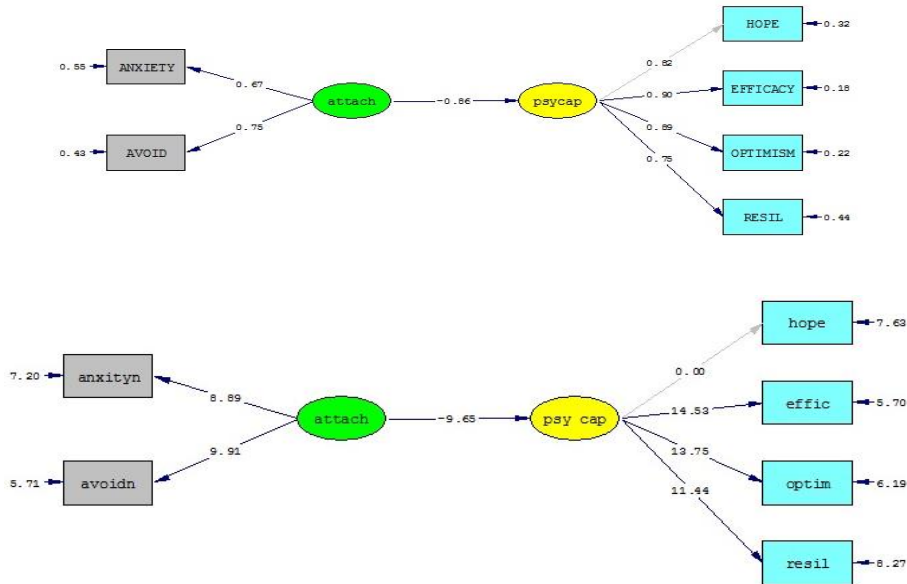


Fig. 5. The SEM results between attachment and psychological capital

## Discussion

### 1. Research results

The current research aimed to identify the relationship between attachment styles and the dimensions of psychological capital among the employees of a hospital in Tehran. The results of the study are as follows. More than 40% of the respondents had secure attachment style, 28% had fearful attachment style, 16% had dismissing attachment style, and 14% had preoccupied attachment style.

On the other hand, the results of standard equation modeling indicate a 0.67% explanation of the dimension of anxiety and a 0.75% explanation of the dimension of avoidance in attachment. Finally, the results of standard equation modeling showed that attachment style has a negative effect on psychological capital with a value of (-0.86), a negative effect on hope with a value of (-0.57), a negative effect on efficacy with a value of (-0.63), a negative effect on optimism with a value of (-0.62), and a negative effect on resiliency with a value of (-0.55). It is obvious that all research hypotheses, including primary and

secondary hypotheses were confirmed. Thus, the results of this research for the dimensions of hope and resiliency (Tosone et al., 2010; Grunert, 2008) and also for the dimensions of self-efficacy and optimism conform to previous studies (Wei et al., 2005; Sandoval, 2008).

The analysis of the results indicates that people with secure attachment style possess higher positive psychological capacities at the workplace. The existence of a significant relationship and the effect of attachment on psychological capital mean that the presence or absence of anxiety and avoidance in the behavioral traits of employees can indicate that they possess or lack the psychological capital. In general, the relationships in the model suggest that attachment style as a psychological variable can lead to significant results for positive organizational behavior in which security is considered a positive characteristic at the workplace.

Similar to previous studies, the results of this study show that attachment is significantly related to psychological capital. According to the literature, attachment style implies a sense of safety or security in one's mind that is transmitted to older adults through internal working models. It is this feeling (perception) that forms the cornerstone of some important personality, attitudinal, and behavioral variables. In particular, a person's sense (perception) of safety about the world around him/her, which is the result of a secure attachment, can make him optimist, build his self-efficacy and hope, and make him/her resilient.

Considering the previously mentioned points about the importance of psychological capital in occupations where job burnout is more likely to occur (e.g. nursing), it can be said that attachment style plays an important role in the occupational and psychological health of the people who work in these occupations. According to the findings of this study, people with the secure attachment style have psychological capital and therefore are better able to deal with the risk of job burnout. In other words, one of the conditions for having psychological and occupational health for people working in jobs with high probability of job burnout is having a secure attachment style. Through positive organizational behavior variables such as psychological capital, the secure attachment style provides the basis

for dealing with people who suffer from occupational injuries, including one of the most important injuries in nursing, i.e. burnout.

## **2. Recommendations**

The validity and reliability obtained for attachment and psychological capital questionnaires indicate that these questionnaires are suitable measures for studying attachment style and psychological capital among employees of organizations. Testing the hypotheses also shows attachment has significant effects on the dimensions of psychological capital. With regard to the volume of effect, attachment has the highest effect on efficacy (-0.63), and has the lowest volume of effect on resiliency (-0.55).

The results of this study can be helpful to the managers of organizations in that via their awareness of attachment style, managers of organizations in Iran can identify positive psychological capacities of individuals at the workplace. Also, by designing suitable behavioral programs for individuals with insecure attachment styles, they can prepare the grounds for their change so that they can form psychological capital. Evaluating individuals' attachment styles at the time of employment and also developing plans and interfering to make these styles more secure can enable organizations to use positive psychological traits of individuals to achieve higher organizational efficiency.

This study has some theoretical contributions. First, attachment styles were studied in the organizational behavior research area. The stream of research on attachment at the workplace continues to flourish, as nearly 50% of the papers in this area have been published in recent years (Reizer et al., 2019). Additionally, it investigates the new variables in organizational behavior. Finally, it brings attachment styles to an area which was largely ignored, i.e. positive psychology. A few studies investigated the relationship between attachment styles and some positive effects and experiences (Ehrhardt & Ragins, 2019), while most researchers have studied it explicitly from the positive psychology perspective.

Given that this study has been done at a hospital in Tehran, subsequent research can study variables at other organizations, on other employees at different organizations, and in different geographical areas, and thereby overcome limitations of the study. Additionally,

future research can investigate the relationship between other individual or organizational variables affecting psychological capital.

Also with regard to previous studies (Sandoval, 2008; Wei et al., 2005) and the results of this research which is in line with them, attachment styles – as one of the important psychological variables – can be taken into consideration in new fields such as positive psychology and positive organizational scholarship, and organizational managers may pay attention to evaluation and planning to enhance their security.



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