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Understanding abusive relationships of immigrant adolescents through their attachments and separations

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to examine attachment styles of immigrant adolescents and its association with their involvement in abusive relationships. Literature suggests that immigration-related separation and other stressors leads to parental conflict and development of insecure attachment amongst immigrant adolescents which are responsible for mediating and moderating intimate partner violence. Childhood maltreatment, family conflict, self-esteem and investment in the relationship were discussed as the risk factors for abusive relationships. It was concluded that immigrant adolescents are at higher risk of being involved in abusive relationships due to their insecure attachment style and presence of the risk factors mentioned above. It was recommended that to fully understand and address the problem of abusive relationships among the immigrant adolescents, the deep lying issue of insecure attachment and parental conflict be acknowledged.

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## **Introduction**

In 2010 immigrants made up 12.9% of the total population of the United States of America with more than 40 million immigrants living in various parts of the country (American Community Survey [ACS], 2010). If illegal immigrants are to be considered then the number goes up even higher. While, these immigrants have been in this country for years, their lives are not without challenges. Mitrani, Santisteban and Muir (2004) suggest that immigrants face significantly more number of life stressors that can have potentially adverse effects on their mental health. The psychological effects of immigration and related stressors they face can lead to pronounced effect of daily life problems. Among various such problems they face in their life that affects their quality of life and mental health, involvement in abusive relationships is an important one.

Intimate partner violence and involvement in abusive relationships are one of the biggest public health issues in America. A CDC report estimated that every year more than 12 million Americans report of being involved in some kind of relationship violence. The same report also indicated that the life time prevalence rate of intimate partner violence is 48%, meaning about half of the population have been a part of an abusive relationship at some point in their lives. This is a serious health concern with adverse effects of being involved in such relationships ranging from gastrointestinal diseases to severe mental illnesses including PTSD and memory loss. Therefore, it becomes important to identify this issue as a primary health concern and take necessary steps to address this issue in order to minimize the violence. It is especially vital to explore this problem among the immigrants, who as mentioned above are already dealing with various other immigration induced psychological problems, which have the potential to aggravate the violence in their relationships.

This paper is an attempt to analyze such abusive relationships among the adolescent immigrant population in the United States and explore how their style/patterns of attachment might be one of the major predictors of such behavior. It hopes to establish abusive relationships in the immigrant adolescent population as a unique phenomenon that is an outcome of migrated related separations and attachments and the tension it creates within immigrant families. The paper will further explore how such separations shape parent-child attachments in immigrant families and its effect on the future relationships of the immigrant children.

### **Attachment Theory**

Attachment theory is one of the most cited and influential theoretical perspectives in psychology. Introduced first by Bowlby in 1951, to describe the relationship patterns between children and their primary care givers, it has since been expanded to various other kinds of relationships including peer attachments and romantic partnerships (Hazan and Shaver, 1987). In fact, Bowlby believed the theory itself to be so expansive, that when asked by his wife what he would turn his attention to after finishing his first paper on attachment, he answered that the topic itself would last him a lifetime (George & West, 2001). Not unlike his prediction, attachment theory has worked as the stepping-stone for various other theories and attachment has been the crux for various working models explaining the behaviors of people in different relationships. This paper thus is an attempt to use the attachment theory in a similar fashion, to analyze the adolescent immigrant population in the United States and explore how their style/patterns of attachment might lead to abusive relationships.

According to psychologist Mary Ainsworth, attachment "may be defined as an affectional ties that one person or animal forms between himself and another specific one – a tie that binds them together in space and endures over time" (Ainsworth and Bell, 1970 p. 50). However, any sort of connection between two people cannot be put under the category of an attachment. Based on the nature of relationship between an infant and its primary caregiver, usually the mother, Bowlby put forward certain characteristic features of an attachment. These include:

1. **Proximity Maintenance**- the desire for constant proximity with the primary caregiver.
2. **Separation Distress**- the feeling of restlessness and distress when separation occurs.
3. **Safe Haven** - Returning to the attachment figure for comfort and safety in the face of a fear or threat.
4. **Secure Base** - The attachment figure acts as a base of security from which the child can explore the surrounding environment.

Reciprocally, in an attachment relationship the primary caregiver is responsive towards all the needs of the infant. This type of relational behavior is classified as an attachment and has been found to be universal. Bowlby (1958) further proposed that attachment could be understood within an evolutionary context in that the caregiver provides safety and security for the infant. It enhances the infant's chance of survival thus the universal need to seek close proximity with their caregiver when under stress or threatened and thus has evolved as an adaptive mechanism (Prior & Glaser, 2006).

### **Childhood Attachment Styles**

Mary Ainsworth (1978) further extended Bowlby's theory of attachment to establish that there were three major kinds of attachment patterns between the primary caregiver and the

infant. Through a series of studies known as the ‘Strange Situation experiments’ in which the behavior of the children between the age of 12 and 18 months was observed when they are responding to a situation in which they were briefly left alone and then reunited with their mother she was able to conclude that there were three major kinds of attachment: secure attachment, ambivalent-insecure attachment, and avoidant-insecure attachment. Main and Solomon (1986) added a fourth attachment style known as disorganized-insecure attachment in addition to the three mentioned above. The children were categorized into one of these attachment styles by observing their behavior during the absence of the mother and the response they gave when reunited. The exact responses of the infants and the caregiver are listed in the table below.

<b>Attachment Pattern</b>	<b>Child</b>	<b>Caregiver</b>
Secure	Uses caregiver as a secure base for exploration. Protests caregiver's departure and seeks proximity and is comforted on return, returning to exploration. May be comforted by the stranger but shows clear preference for the caregiver.	Responds appropriately, promptly and consistently to needs. Caregiver has successfully formed a secure parental attachment bond to the child.
Avoidant	Little affective sharing in play. Little or no distress on departure, little or no visible response to return, ignoring or turning away with no effort to maintain contact if picked up. Treats the stranger similarly to the caregiver. The child feels that there is no attachment; therefore, the child is rebellious and has a lower self-image and self-esteem.	Little or no response to distressed child. Discourages crying and encourages independence.

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Ambivalent/Resistant	<p>Unable to use caregiver as a secure base, seeking proximity before separation occurs. Distressed on separation with ambivalence, anger, reluctance to warm to caregiver and return to play on return. Preoccupied with caregiver's availability, seeking contact but resisting angrily when it is achieved. Not easily calmed by stranger. In this relationship, the child always feels anxious because the caregiver's availability is never consistent.</p>	<p>Inconsistent between appropriate and neglectful responses. Generally will only respond after increased attachment behavior from the infant.</p>
Disorganized	<p>Stereotypies on return such as freezing or rocking. Lack of coherent attachment strategy shown by contradictory, disoriented behaviors such as approaching but with the back turned.</p>	<p>Frightened or frightening behavior, intrusiveness, withdrawal, negativity, role confusion, affective communication errors and maltreatment. Very often associated with many forms of abuse towards the child.</p>

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Table 1- Taken from Solomon (1986)

### **Attachment in Adults and Intimate Relationships**

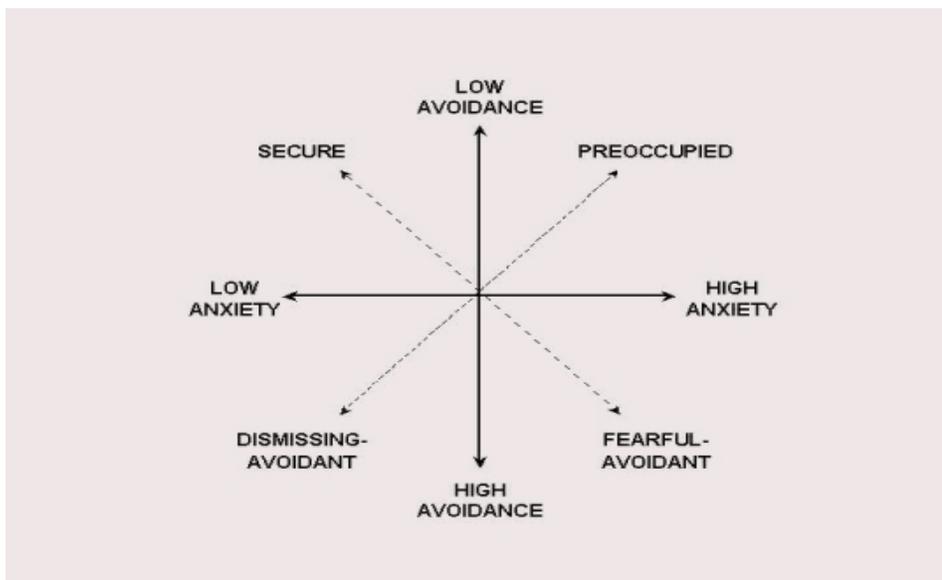
While Bowlby used the Attachment Theory to primarily discuss the relationship between an infant and the primary caregiver, the theory has since been used to describe various other adult relationships. Sperling and Berman (1994) define adult attachment as the “stable tendency of an individual to make substantial efforts to seek proximity and contact with one or a few specific individuals who provide the subjective potential for physical and/or psychological safety” (p.8). While the general characteristic features of adult attachment are not very different to that of child-caregiver attachment, what differentiates it is that these attachments are defined by the expectation that one can rely on their attachment figures on when in need rather than the

actual presence of security and comforting behavior. Therefore unlike a child-caregiver relationship which most often than not produces feelings of wellness and safety, this expectation and the speculation whether they will be actually fulfilled can produce anxiety and anger in adult attachments (Ainsworth, 1989). Consequently various adult relationships are maintained despite any challenges with the hope of security and comfort in the future (Sperling and Berman, 1994). Quite different from childhood attachment the behavioral patterns of these attachment styles may change over time, however they do maintain the same characteristic core representational features throughout one's life. Therefore, the nature and style of attachment of adults in one relationship can predict or even shape their attachment patterns in future relationships (Sperling and Berman, 1994). Traditionally adults are classified into four styles of attachments analogous to the childhood attachments-autonomous, dismissing, preoccupied and unresolved.

<b>ADULT ATTACHMENT STATUS OVERVIEW</b>		
<b>Adult attachment status</b>	<b>Implicit assumptions about attachment relationships</b>	<b>Mental rules to handle attachment activation</b>
<b>Secure (F)</b>	Needs for safety and security are acceptable and recognized. Support is there when needed.	Express what is needed or feared, because support is likely. Problems can be addressed and processed.
<b>Dismissing (Ds)</b>	Needs for safety and security are ignored, rejected or disapproved of. Support is not there when needed.	Do not express what is needed or feared. Disassociate from the source of anxiety. Do not depend on others.
<b>Preoccupied (E)</b>	Needs for safety and security are sometimes ignored, but sometimes care is intrusive. Sometimes the caregiver needs help instead of giving help. Care and security are inconsistent.	Be extra sensitive towards attachment figures as they are not dependable. Worry about them.
<b>Unresolved</b>	There is potential for isolation when needy, or even danger from those on whom you depend. There is the loss of those you need most. There is danger from those you need.	There is no resolution to a dangerous situation. Sometimes you are left to fate, isolated and/or threatened. There is no time to think or feel, and there are strong emotions that can overwhelm.

Table 2- Taken from Ecke. Chope and Emmelkamp (2005)

Since attachment patterns in adult are not as rigid as childhood attachments and intimacy is often a driving force behind such attachments, many researchers find it better to study them dimensionally rather than categorically. As proposed first by Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998) adult attachments are measured through two major dimensions, which are independent of each other- anxiety and avoidance. The anxiety component is representative of the degree to which a person is worried about the responsiveness and commitment of his partner and whether they feel their partner will always be available to them. On the other hand, the avoidance component is a represents the degree of comfort one has in being intimate and reliant on one's partner. A secure attachment under this system would be a person who scores low on both attachment anxiety as well as avoidance meaning they feel comfortable being intimate and dependent on their partners and believe that that they have get adequate availability and attention from their attachment figures and is the description used by this paper. All the other combinations of avoidance and anxiety are considered to be different types of insecure attachment and are summarized in the figure below. The behavioral patterns of the fearful-avoidant types are the same as unresolved attachment style described in Table 2.



Taken from Brennan, Clark, & Shaver (1998)

**Attachment and adolescence: Shift from Childhood to Adult Attachments**

On top of host of other changes, adolescence also brings about a shift from parents to peers as the primary attachment figures. This shift in primary attachment figures has been attributed to two major factors. First, the major developmental changes during this period include abstract reasoning abilities and logical thinking capabilities (Keating, 1990). This allows them to critically analyze their relationship between them and their parents. Since logical reasoning provides them with the skills of deduction and induction, such scrutiny on their relationship with their parents can lead them recognize that they are unable to meet all their attachment needs and thus they have to seek external sources to fulfill them (Kobak & Duemmler, 1994). Secondly, during adolescence there is a “growing push towards differentiation, independence, and autonomy from parents” (Erikson, 1963) thus leading teenagers to avoid the help of their parents as much as possible. These two factors combine to prompt the adolescent to seek other sources of attachment rather than their parents leading them to shift their focus on their peers.

However, there have been various studies indicating that this shift from parents to peers as primary attachment figures is often complicated and incomplete throughout the adolescence. The primary motivation behind the shift to peers is not to defy the authority of parents but to gain independence (Youniss and Smillar, 1985). Therefore, such shift is often a gradual process where children slowly become less dependent on their parents for attachment needs as they become increasingly autonomous. Therefore even though the shift towards autonomy is already underway, most adolescents still use parents as their primary attachment figures even through young adulthood and turn to their parents in condition of stress even at the expense of their autonomy (Youniss and Smillar, 1985).

Cassidy and Shaver (2008) note that these transitions are never smooth and some confusion and tension may often be inevitable. These tensions often stem from the parent's failure of parents to acknowledge the autonomy of the adolescents and can lead them to be hostile and angry towards the parents who they deem to be deficient (Kobak and Duemmler, 1994). Additionally, some adolescents have difficulty forming attachment bonds with their peers and tend to suffer from chronic loneliness. Studies suggest that loneliness is more widespread and painful during this developmental period than for any other age group. Culp et al. (1995) found that 66% of teens report problems with loneliness. In comparison, the studies showed that only 10–36% of the adult and elderly population report loneliness as a problem.

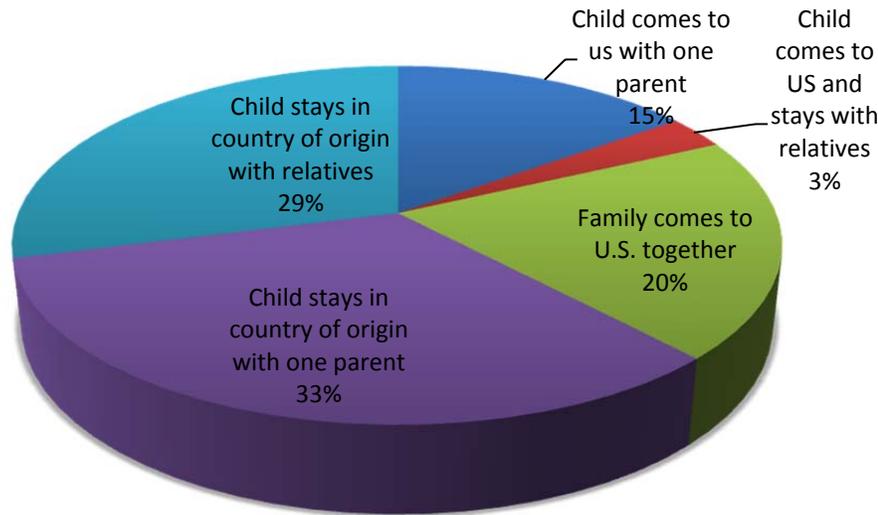
While it has been noted that this transition is more often than not a struggle, it has been theorized that certain factors can make this process relatively easier (Cassidy and Shaver, 2008). Among these, the type of attachment style the adolescent has maintained with their parents in the past seems to be a critical factor. This argument is supported by the findings from Allen, Hauser, Bell and O'Connor (1994) who observed that stable adolescent autonomy seeking behavior tends to be highly correlated with stable attachment patterns and positive relationships with the parents. They also observed that adolescents whose parents related and tried to understand their effort to become independent were more likely to find a better balance between their struggle for autonomy and their relationship with their parents. Therefore, it becomes critical that the relationship and attachment style between an adolescent and their parents be analyzed in order to fully understand the transitional phase of the adolescence attachment.

### **Immigration and Attachment**

In terms of attachment immigration is a complex processes. Bowlby (1969) asserted that attachment however is not just to a person; secure attachment requires attachment both to a persona and to the environment. Therefore, the change in environment and the separation it causes can be detrimental to the formation of secure attachments. Various researches (Mitrani, Santisteban and Muir, 2004; Sue and Sue, 1999) suggest there are numerous life stressors and immigration experiences that tend to affect the mental health of the immigrants disproportionately. This becomes an even more important factor to consider for the mental health of the adolescents since they are already going through the transitory phase mentioned above. Moreover, the immigration system in the United States of America makes this process even more difficult.

After the mid-sixties, U.S. immigration policies changed and started stressing reunification of the immigrants in the country with their families. Under this policy, parents, spouses, and children of U. S. citizens could become legal permanent residents. After five years, the green card holders (legal permanent residents) became eligible to become naturalized citizens, and when the parents became citizens, so did their children. Consequently, the most likely scenario of an immigrant family is one in which one or both of the parents first travel to the United States and their children are brought here later after they get settled (UCLA, 2011). Urban Institute (Fix et al., 2001) reports that family sponsored immigrants account for nearly 75% of all legal entrants into the United States. In a study done by Mitrani, Santisteban and Muir (2004) among the 236 Latin American immigrant families, 90% had experienced immigration related separations. Similarly, Orozco and Orozco (2002) also reported that 85% of the

immigrant youth in their sample had experienced immigration related separation with their parents. These separations can be experienced form either one or both the parents.



Orozco and Orozco (2002) – Children of immigration

The chart above shows different experiences faced by the immigrant youths (Orozco and Orozco, 2002). One can note that during the process of immigration a child goes through separation from one parent, or the other, 80% of the time and more than one in every three child suffers separation from both the parents. While Orozco's sample consisted mainly of Latin American immigrants, similar pattern have been observed among other immigrants groups as well. For instance, in a study done by Thrasher and Anderson (1988) 77% of the children of the working Caribbean immigrants in New York were being raised by someone other than their biological parents. Gaupal-McNicol (1993) also reported that during the time of his study, 98% of the total immigrant Caribbean children in the United States had suffered from immigration related separation from either both or one parent at some point.

However, it's not only the separation from parents that these immigrant children have to go through. Sewell-Coker, Hamilton-Collins, and Fein (1985) observed that most of the times, during the absence of their parents immigrant children develop a strong attachment with their caretakers and thus suffer a second separation upon reunification with their parents. This not only causes great pain and loss for the immigrant children but also acts as a potential source of tension between them and their parents, who they think are responsible for such separation. Consequently, for the immigrant children the process of family reunifications ensues conflicting feelings of happiness and profound sadness. While they feel sad about leaving their caregivers, family members, and friends behind, the joy of being reunited with their parents also exists. These multiple separations ensure that even in the best of circumstances, reunifications are tainted by the pain of loss (Suarez-Orozco et al. 2002).

### **Consequence of Immigration-Related Separations**

It is important then to question what these separations can mean for the immigrant adolescents. Especially, from the point of view of attachments, these obstructions caused by separations can add to the already challenging transitory attachment phase of the adolescence. Masterson (1985) believes that such separations from parents can have a profound effect on the personal development of the child. He observes that such separations are especially vital during two time periods of the child: first between 1.5 to 3yrs and secondly during the start of adolescence at around 12 yrs. of age. Studies have concluded that the separation from parents occurs most commonly during the early childhood, with the parents seeking employment abroad as a way to adapt to the increased financial burden coming from the children. On the other hand as result of the lengthy immigration processes, which go on for years family reunification and

thus the subsequent separation from their temporary caregivers do not take place until the children have already entered their adolescence (Pottinger, 2005). The fact that these separations occur during what psychologists believe to be two vital age periods in terms of attachment, leads to speculation that they have an intense effect on the attachment style of these immigrant adolescent youths. These views were resonated in a study done by Mitrani, Santisteban and Muir (2004) who indicated that these separations occur during a time period in the children's lives, which are vital in terms of attachment and thus are significant obstructions in the path of smooth development of these children. In fact, the prevalence of psychological problems among these children has been found to be much higher than the general population. Research suggests that these separation issues can lead to problems such as depressive responses, behavior problems, and patterns of rejection of their parents (Orozco, Todorova, and Louie, 2002). Similarly, feelings of abandonment, powerlessness and resentment are also common in children who experience family separations while poor educational outcomes have also been linked to family separations for children in Mexico and the United States (Dreby, 2007)

Perhaps, the most important impact of such separation and reunification process is the strain it puts in the relationship between the immigrant children and their parents. Regarding this parent-child tension Woodward, Fergusson and Belsky (2000) suggest that parent-child separation can have important effects on the mental health of the youth. Their findings suggested that younger the child is at the time of the separation, more severe are the consequences. They reported that children who have been separated from their parents between 0-5 years are significantly more likely to self-report lower attachment to parents in adolescence in comparison to separation that occurred between 5-10 years or 10-15 years. As mentioned above, since the separation between immigrant parents and their children occurs during this age, even upon

reunion with parents during later stages of their lives, immigrant youth fail to form a strong attachment with their parent. Pottinger (2006) notes that the child in response to difficulty adjusting to the new culture and environment often exhibit anger and rebellion, inducing harsh punishments from parents who feel undervalued for the sacrifices they believe they have made for their children which further increase the tension between them.

It is clear from the above passages that there is a great deal of transformations surrounding various relationships in immigrant children's lives during the process of reunification. The children not only have to deal with reconnecting with parents that have not been involved in their lives for years and are virtually strangers to them, but also have to redefine and readjust their relationships with caregivers, friends and romantic partners they left behind when they migrated into another country. It would therefore not be far-fetched to suggest that there is an immense focus on their relationships with different people during this period. However, it is surprising that barring their relationship with their parents, very little has been written how these pressures induced by immigration affects other relationships in their lives. In particular, rarely has any study explored if these circumstances have any significant effect in the future relationships of these immigrant children and the processes involved that contribute to it. Very few researches have investigated the effects of such immigration related stressors on the ability of these immigrant adolescents to form healthy relationships, their behavior when in a relationship and their capability to handle intimacy. This paper thus attempts to explore one of the potential consequences of such immigration related changes on the relationships formed by these children. It tries to explain how development of these children in this context may create a situation where they are more likely to be involved in abusive relationships than general adolescent population, either as perpetrators or as the victims. It makes an effort to describe how

this phenomenon manifests itself in this population by working within the framework of attachment theory. It explores, in terms of their attachments and separations especially with their parents, why these immigrant youth might be more likely to be willing to persevere with relationships despite of them being abusive in nature either to them or their partners.

### **Defining Abusive Relationships**

Before moving onto the discussion about abusive relationships in immigrant adolescents, it is first important to clarify what an abusive relationship means and to establish a working definition of relationship violence this paper is based upon. Perhaps the most important literature regarding violence in an intimate relationship was produced by Johnson (1995) and Johnson & Ferraro, (2000). They differentiated between two major types of violent incidents that occur within a relationship - "common couple violence," and more severe abusive violence, known as battering or "intimate terrorism." Instances of common couple violence are less austere in nature and involve minor pushing, shoving and other limited physical contacts. Consequently, it is quite rare for a serious injury to ensue from such violence. Rather than being a pre-planned action it is often an outcome of an argument gone out of hand. More than anything else it reflects an act of impulse resulting from frustration with one's partner. Johnson (1995) believes such couples need to work on their problem solving skills as a couple to avoid such instances, however acknowledge that at some level it exists in every relationship. He also observed that males and females are equally responsible for such kind of violence with no particular gender divide between the victims or the perpetrators.

On the other hand, battering or what has been described by Johnson and Ferraro (2000) as ‘intimate terrorism’ involves frequent acts of physical or emotional abuse. Perhaps the most important feature that distinguishes between these two forms of violence is the intention behind it. While common couple violence is often result of an argument gone out of hand or merely an impulsive action, battering as described by Simpson et al. (2007) is “a deliberate act that consists of systematic efforts by one partner to control, dominate, and terrorize the other through acts of physical violence, emotional abuse, economic control, sexual coercion, and social isolation” (p. 271). Thus unlike common couple violence, battering involves various pre planned physical, emotional or social tactics targeted at dominating the other partner. It is then important to note that battering may include behaviors that are usually also seen in common couple violence, however the frequency of such incidents are much higher in intimate terrorism and are carried out with the intent of asserting one’s dominance over the other. Physical abuse as used in this definition refers to any physical contact initiated with the intention of causing harm or distress to the other. The patterns involved in the other types of strategies involved in intimate terrorism as mentioned in the above definition are described in the table below. The descriptions are taken from studies done by Walker (1979) and Johnson (1995).

Type of Emotional Abuse	Behavioral pattern involved
Isolation	Systematically starving the partner off proper social or financial support restricting them from dealing effectively with the problems in the relationship.
Jealousy/ Possessiveness	Being jealous of everyone in their partner’s life, including family, friends, and even pets. Jealousy and possessiveness appear to become

	abusive when one harangues and interrogates their partner about strangers or other men/women they come in contact with. Constant accusations of infidelity and attempts to control how one dresses or what company they keep also common.
Verbal Threats	Even though physical abuse may not be involved constant threat of abuse, harm, or torture towards the partner or the partner's loved ones including other family members, children or friends is possible in abusive relationships
Emotional Blackmailing	Constant threat of breaking off the relationship if the partner does not comply with one's wishes.
Destruction of Personal Objects	Selective destruction of objects and personal belongings including clothing, accessories, pictures, memorabilia etc. most dear to their partner.

This paper takes the presence of such battering or “intimate terrorism” as a defining characteristic of an abusive relationship. The decision to disregard common couple violence and emphasize intimate terrorism was influenced by various studies (Bowlby, 1988; Munroe, Stuart and Hutchinson, 1997) that suggest that attachment anxiety and avoidance can often lead people to take extreme measures including violence in order to control their partners. Since the intention to control one's partner is the defining characteristic of intimate terrorism, it becomes more relevant when operating within the boundaries of attachment theory. It has to be stressed

however, that as mentioned above this includes not only physical violence, but also emotional abuse and every other action performed within the relationship with the intention to control, dominate or manipulate the action of one's partner.

### **The Importance of Studying Abusive Relationships**

The statistics regarding intimate partner violence reveals a grim story. While the rates of existence of such abusive relationships have declined over the years, it still remains the major source of non-fatal violence among men and women. Intimate partner violence made up 20% of violent crime against women in 2001. By contrast, during the year intimate partners committed 3% of all nonfatal crime. The absolute number reveal a closer similarity incidence rate in both men and women, with 162,870 women and 103,220 men reported victims within an abusive relationship. These however are only the reported cases of intimate partner violence with the real number thought to be much higher. In fact, in a study done by CDC in 2010, it was estimated that over 12 million Americans are involved in abusive relationships and thus undergo through some sort of intimate partner violence every year. The same survey also revealed that more than half (51.1%) of female victims of rape reported being raped by an intimate partner with the same number climbing up to 52.4% for men. Similarly, it was also observed that nearly half of all women and men in the United States have experienced psychological aggression and emotional abuse by an intimate partner in their lifetime (48.4% and 48.8%, respectively). Moreover, the survey also concluded that one in every 4 women and one in every 7 men, have been victims of at some point in their lifetime.

Numbers disclose worse situation when adolescent and pre-adult age is emphasized. 1 in 3 teenagers report knowing a friend or peer who has been hit, punched, kicked, slapped, choked

or physically hurt by their partner. (LiClaiborne, 2005.) 1 in 4 teenage girls who have been in relationships reveal they have been pressured to perform oral sex or engage in intercourse. More than 1 in 4 teenage girls in a relationship (26%) report enduring repeated verbal abuse. One in three teens (30%) say they are text messaged 10, 20, 30 times an hour by a partner inquiring where they are, what they're doing, or who they're with which as described above is a form of emotional abuse and thus a possible indication of abusive relationships.

The number while communicating a grim story does not fully justify the emphasis being placed upon study of abusive relationship in this paper. To better understand the gravity of the situation one has to take into consideration two important points. First of all there are significant physical, emotional and mental consequences of involvement in such relationship that persist long after the relationship has ended. For instance, in comparison to other women, abused women complain significantly more about headache, back pain, vaginal infection, and digestive problems. Similarly, they are also in increased risk for other gynecological, central nervous systems and stress related health risk. In fact Campbell et al. (2002) concluded that increase in such problem after abuse is between 50-70%. Similarly mental health issues are also heightened with PTSD and chronic depression the most common scenarios after depression. Moreover, lack of mental clarity, dizziness, partial memory loss and generalized anxiety is also more prevalent among abused women (Campbell and Lewandowski, 1997). A summary of literature on mental and physical effects of abusive relationship can be found in the table below-

Table taken from Campbell, Dienemann and Jones (2002).

	McCauley et al	Campbell et al	Coker et al	Leserman et al	Plichta
<b>Symptoms</b>					
General health lower or number of symptoms higher than average	S	S	S	S	S
Digestive problems: diarrhoea, spastic colon, constipation, nausea	S	S	S	NM	NM
Loss of appetite, eating binges, making self vomit	S	S	NM	NS	NM
Abdominal pain, stomach pain	S	S	NM	NM	NM
UTI: bladder/kidney infection, pain, problems with urination	S	S	S	NS	S
Vaginal infection: discharge, itching	S	S	NM	S	NM
Sexually transmitted disease	NM	S	S	NM	NM
AIDS or HIV-1	NM	NS	NM	NM	NM
Vaginal bleeding, severe menstrual problems, dysmenorrhoea	NM	S	NM	NM	NM
Pelvic pain, genital area pain	S	S	S	S	NM
Fibroids or hysterectomy	NM	NS	S	NM	NM
Painful intercourse, sexual dysfunction	NM	S	S	S	NM
Headaches, migraines	S	S	S	S	S
Fainting, passing out	S	NS	NM	S	S
Seizures, convulsions	NM	NS	S	NM	NM
Back pain, chronic neck pain	NS	S	S	S	S
Influenza or cold, stuffy or runny nose	NM	NS	NM	S	NM
Hypertension	NM	NS	S	NM	NM

S-Significant, NS-non-significant, NM- not measured in the study

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly it is also important to acknowledge the fact that even under such violent circumstances, the occurrence of these abusive relationships persist and more often than not it is with the same partner. Three in four women who reported they had been raped and/or physically assaulted since age 18 said that a current or former husband, cohabiting partner, or date committed the assault. Similarly among teens, it was reported that 80 % of them continued to date the same person who had physically abused them in the past (US Department of Justice [USDJ]). Dutton (1994) notes that adults that report intimate partner violence also recall similar violent incidents in adolescent relationships. While, this hints to a possibility that involvement in abusive relationships, as an adolescent may be an indicator of similar future behavior, it also reveals the necessity of intervention and counseling in order to prevent women from persisting with such behavior. Especially considering that the majority (67%–80%) of intimate partner homicides involves physical abuse before the murder (USDJ), no matter which partner is killed it becomes important to identify and intervene during early stages of such relationships. Such interventions are especially critical during adolescent and young adulthood

considering that they seem to start at that age, the transitional phase it resembles and the lack of knowledge about healthy relationships during that age. One of such ways of identification and intervention, especially among the immigrant teens is acknowledgment of attachment and separation patterns in their lives as a major source why they tend to be involved in such relationships and thus address the issues of insecure or non-existent attachment they have with their parents.

As mentioned earlier in the paper, psychological problems in immigrant adolescents and dating violence among general adolescent population are significant issues in themselves. Consequently, when a case of an immigrant adolescent being involved in an abusive relationship comes up it gets bracketed as one of those two problems, rather than being treated as a unique phenomenon. It either gets branded as a one of the reactionary psychological problems faced by the immigrant teens due to their failure to adapt to the huge change in their environment and culture or just another case of dating violence in adolescence due to the transitory phase of this particular phase. As a result, therapy is often directed towards these problems rather than issues specific to the immigrant adolescents. However, by identifying separations, attachment styles and their relationship with their parents as the underlying cause of abusive romantic relationships psychotherapy can be directed at working on these latent issues and thus preventing similar incidents in the future.

### **Separations and Attachment Styles**

The effect of separations on parent-child relationships and other subsequent relationships has been discussed briefly before in this paper. However, the effect of such immigration-induced separations on attachment styles and patterns of the immigrant children is yet to be established. Since, the very foundation of attachment theory is based on parent-child relationship and

detection of attachment style based on separation from parents; it would be safe to assume that such prolonged separations as faced during immigration will have significant effect on the attachment style of the child. However, there are few studies exploring the attachment styles of immigrants specifically. Therefore, this paper makes use of separation literature regarding orphan and foster care children to propose a model based on which the attachment patterns of the immigrant adolescent can be described as well. The similarities such as absence of care givers, lack of a strong attachment figure etc. between the children in foster care and immigrant children make the comparison a relevant one. Numerous studies have been dedicated to exploring the effect of loss of parents in the attachment styles of these children. Perhaps the most consistent theme that comes up in these studies is that loss/ absence of parents more often than not leads to the child developing insecure attachment style and exhibiting dismissive behavior (Brennan & Shaver, 1998; Luecken 2000). Moreover the same studies also concluded that children who grow up in the absence of their parents exhibit significant fear of intimacy and attachment anxiety in adult relationships, another sign of insecure attachment style. Similar results were found among foster care children. In a study done by McWey and Mullis (2004), it was revealed that over 86% of the children in foster care had insecure attachment patterns and showed avoidant behaviors. If one was to consider the behavior of parents in case of avoidant children as mentioned in table 1, then these statistics should not be a surprise. Avoidant and dismissive attachment styles are a result of no or little care from the parent thus prolonged separation from parents would lead to development of such attachment patterns. While inconsistent parenting as noted in table 1 can cause attachment insecurity in itself, dismissive/avoidant style in particular usually is the result of unavailability of parents during major development processes.

Foster care studies further reveal that development of insecure attachments particularly avoidant-dismissive form of attachment and degree to which they are formulated are dependent on various factors. The main factors that determine the degree of insecurity in these children were age at which these separations occur, length of separation from parents, frequency of visitation by the parents and the quality of care in their absence (McWey and Mullis, 2004). They found that the level of attachment insecurity increased with more time spent in foster care. It was observed that visitation of biological parents of the children in foster care not only helped to maintain the physical and emotional growth of the children (Hess, 1988) but also contributes to reduce the attachment insecurity and avoidance (McWey and Mullis, 2004). Researches also suggest that availability of quality care in the absence of the biological parents can partially be effective in decreasing attachment insecurity (Luecken, 2000). They also suggest that age of separation is a vital component in developing attachment insecurity with children separated at a younger age showing significantly more attachment insecurity.

While the severity of the experience faced by the immigrant youth might be different than those in the foster care or orphanages, their nature is similar. Moreover, they go through all the factors that put them increased risk of developing attachment insecurity and avoidant behavior. As mentioned before in the paper immigration related separations take place during early ages of the child's lives, the length of separation is often long and the financial situation of the immigrants makes frequent visitation very difficult. While, one might argue that unlike foster care children they are in better care amongst their extended family, and it might be partially true it has often been observed that it is no replacement for parental attachment (Ainsworth, 1979). This suggestion that immigration related separation and stress leads to avoidance and devaluation of attachment among immigrants is backed up by few studies that have been done exploring this

topic. For instance, Magai et al. (2000) reported that dismissive-avoidant was the most common attachment style among the African-Caribbean immigrant sample he studied. Harris (2010) obtained similar result reporting increased levels of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance among Caribbean immigrants who had experienced some form of immigration related separation. Among Latin American immigrants while the results were not statistically significant, it was observed that those immigrants who had gone through family separations reported higher attachment anxiety and avoidance (Maria and Cornille, 2007). Thus, one could argue that immigrant population especially those who have gone through separations are high in both the dimensions of attachment insecurity- anxiety as well as avoidance.

### **Insecure Attachment and Relationship Violence**

It is important to question what increased attachment anxiety and avoidance means for these immigrant adolescents in terms of their romantic relationships. Numerous studies have suggested that these initially formed attachment patterns are predictive of attachment patterns in adult romantic relationships (Bowlby, 1980). Increased attachment anxiety in adult romantic relationships as Bowlby (1988) himself speculates is highly counter productive. He believes that increased anxiety about abandonment and loneliness, can lead to them taking extreme measures to prevent their partners from leaving including violence. These measures as Munroe, Stuart and Hutchinson (1997) point out are taken with an intention of “controlling the other and stop them from departing”; therefore even in the absence of physical violence presence of emotional abuse is evident in relationships involving people with high attachment anxiety. Similarly, jealousy in romantic relationships, which as described above is another form of emotional abuse, is very high among people with insecure attachment (Hazan and Shaver, 1987). Similarly, in a study

done by Munroe, Stuart and Hutchinson (1997) comparing attachment styles of violent and non-violent husbands, it was observed that the violent ones scored significantly higher in both anxiety of abandonment and avoidance of dependency in the relationship. The same study also concluded that these same men were also more apprehensive about their partner's interaction with other males and scored high on jealousy indicating presence of not only physical but emotional abuse as well. The validity of such results is further strengthened by the fact that same conclusion as obtained even after using different methods of assessing attachment and relationship quality. Similar results were also obtained by Babbock et al (2000) with 74% of violent husbands in their sample having insecure attachment styles. Therefore, there is significant evidence that increase in attachment anxiety and avoidance can be predictive of relationship violence.

However, Grych and Kinsfogel (2009) are quick to point out that such results may or may not be true in case of adolescents with evidence available for either side of argument. This is not to say though that attachment styles do not affect relationship violence at all. They rather argue that while a predictive relationship between attachment anxiety and avoidance and relationship violence is ambivalent, there is significant reason to believe that these factors act as moderators for relationship abuse in presence of other conditions. Therefore, attachment anxiety and avoidance rather than directly leading to abusive relationships may help to create one if the people in relationships fall under a certain bracket. Among others these conditions include history of child maltreatment and presence of family conflict. These situations are not uncommon among immigrant families and therefore justify the need to explore. The following sections explore various processes by which insecure attachment patterns might increase the susceptibility of immigrant adolescents to be involved in abusive relationships.

## **I. Insecure attachment as a mediator and moderator of family conflict and relationship abuse**

As already mentioned immigrant children in response to difficulty adjusting to the new culture and environment often exhibit anger and rebellion towards parents, who in response feeling undervalued for the sacrifices they believe they have made serve harsh punishments often creating a conflict within families (Pottinger, 2006). Artico (2003) notes the key to the relationship between the child and the parents after reunification is heavily dependent on the level and the quality of the communication between the two. However, it is also believed that due to financial constraints and immigrants have multiple jobs, there is limited communication between the parents and the children. This adds to the pre existing tension in the relationship and widens the differences between the two. On the other hand conflict may still be existent in these families even when the communications are better due to different expectations of the children and parents post reunification. As discussed earlier, in terms of attachment, adolescence represents a period when children shift their focus from parents as primary attachment figures to their peers. However, when immigrant families reunite after a long period of separations the parents might expect more affection and closer relationship with their children. On the other hand immigrant children being in the adolescence and considering that they have not met their parents for years, try to detach from their parents and reject their acts of affection often leading to hostile confrontations. Therefore, it is likely that the cases of family conflict and aggression in immigrant families who have been through immigration related separations are higher than general population.

Grych and Kinsfogel (2010) believe that this family tension combined with attachment anxiety and avoidance caused by years of separation present an increased risk in terms of violence in their future relationships. They believe that a history of family conflict and tension leads to adolescents engaging in abusive and coercive behavior. The major reason for such family experiences leading to abusive relationships they argue is the ability of these adolescents to justify the aggression they direct towards their dating partners in terms of verbal and physical aggression they face from their parents (Kinsfogel and Grych, 2004). They further explain that usually despite of having high attachment anxiety and avoidance, adolescents refrain from abuse and “aggressive impulses” despite feeling threatened or left out in their relationship. However, presence of the ability to justify violence changes this, with adolescent having attachment anxiety and family conflict more willing to address their fears regarding their relationships by attempting to control their partner with physical or emotional abuse. As Grych and Kinsfogel (2010) argue that “the tendency of anxious-avoidant adolescents to disengage emotionally might undermine the empathy and concern that might otherwise inhibit them from mistreating their boyfriends or girlfriends, and those who view aggression as more justifiable might be less motivated to control aggressive impulses” (p.1-2). The results of their study while indicating anxiety or avoidance not to be a unique predictor of dating violence, showed a significant moderation effect between family conflict and perpetration of abusive behavior in romantic relationships. There were however, subtle differences between the male and female sample. The main moderator of family aggression and dating abuse in the males was found to be anxiety with the correlation increasing from .36 in lower anxiety males to .59 in high anxiety males. In females on the other hand, avoidance was found to be the better moderator between the two with correlation factor increasing from 0.07 in low avoidance girls to .67 among the highly avoidant

ones. However, unlike in their male counterpart attachment anxiety among girls from aggressive families was found to be a significant indicator of victimization with them being the recipient of greater physical as well as emotional abuse from their partners. While, they do not provide an explanation why family conflict and attachment avoidance might lead to victimization similar argument as for perpetration of violence can be presented- these factors interact to justify violence as a part of the relationship and dismiss it. In fact, Alexander (1992) suggests that adolescents who lack secure attachment often actively avoid the memories thus allowing them to continue with the relationship even if it's abusive. While he talks about this in the context of sexual abuse there is no reason why this cannot be true for other kinds of abuse as well. Putting together this evidence one can argue that immigrant adolescents are in greater risk of being involved in abusive relationships not only as the perpetrators but also as the victims. Equally important is to note more immigrant adolescent might be involved in abusive relationships they might also find it harder to break them.

## **II. Insecure attachment as a mediator and moderator of childhood maltreatment and relationship abuse**

Wekerle and Wolfe (1998) proposed a similar mechanism by which attachment styles affected dating violence- they believed that it acted as a moderator between childhood maltreatment and abusive relationships. While they did find significant relationship between self-reported attachment styles alone and relationship abuse and victimization, they noted that the association was much stronger when paired together with childhood maltreatment. They found that that adolescents who were maltreated as children were much more likely to be involved in an abusive relationship – as perpetrators or victims- if they had insecure attachment either

anxious or avoidant. On the other hand, even with history of maltreatment those who had secure style of attachment reported fewer cases of intimate partner violence. Therefore, similar to family conflict attachment style act as a moderator between childhood maltreatment and adolescent dating violence and enhances the association between the two when attachment is insecure. In the context of immigrant children, this puts a great emphasis on the quality of the substitute care these children are placed in when their parents are abroad. More of them than not children are left behind with their extended families especially grandparents. It would be false to claim all these children are subjected to maltreatment of lack proper care, however in the case in which this is true they are exposed to both the risk factors of adolescent dating violence- insecure attachment style and childhood maltreatment. While there are few studies reporting childhood maltreatment is higher in immigrant teens than in general population it is important to note that they are exposed to a number of situations, which have been identified as risk factors for childhood maltreatment by a number of studies. For example, among various parental factors recognized by Brown et al. (1998) as possible risk factors for childhood maltreatment both low paternal and maternal involvement were high in the list. Similarly, the same study also found early separation from mother to be correlated even more strongly with childhood maltreatment. Moreover, poor parent-child relationships, family conflict and childhood anxiety also were recognized as major contributors in increasing the risk of childhood maltreatment. As noted in different occasions throughout this paper immigrant children who go through migration related separations are all exposed to more than one of the risk factors. Consequently, despite lacking statistical evidence it would not be completely wrong to speculate that these children may have been victims of childhood maltreatment in one form or the other. This combined with the attachment style of the immigrant children then as noted above may lead to increased

involvement in abusive relationships as the victims or the perpetrators of violence during their adolescence.

### **III. Insecure attachment, self-esteem and relationship abuse**

Attachment style is also believed to have significant effect on the self-esteem of a person. Sayadpour (2007) observed that secure attachment style is positively correlated with self-esteem while vice versa is the case with insecure attachment style. While, both attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance were found to be negatively correlated with self-esteem, attachment avoidance was a better predictor of low self-esteem than anxiety. Tomich (2001) also reported similar association between attachment style and self-esteem. He also came up with an explanation about how attachment styles could regulate the level of self-esteem in a person. He argued that attribution of different life events is dependent on a person's attachment style. He points out that people with secure attachment have a positive working model of themselves thus allowing them to attribute negative life events to external factors. Similarly, they are also more likely to attribute positive life events to internal factors. Both of these attributions help to increase the level of self-esteem. People with insecure attachments especially ones who are highly avoidant made the exact opposite attributions thus leading to decreased levels of self-esteem. In case of immigrant adolescent self-esteem is further decreased due to the poor quality of relationship with parents, which has also known to be highly correlated with self-esteem (Chan et al, 2012). Long terms separations from parents in these immigrant children can cause feeling of abandonment leading these children to question their self-worth and thus decrease the level of their self-esteem.

Self-esteem has been found to be a predictor of victimization in romantic relationships, however no significant relationship was found between self-esteem and intimate partner violence perpetration. A study done by Anderson (2002) with an all-woman sample revealed that low self-esteem was associated with victimization in romantic relationships. Similarly, Renner and Whitney (2012) also reported that low self-esteem in males was predictive of both intimate partner violence perpetration and victimization. The mechanism through which self-esteem may lead to abusive relationship was however unavailable. One could argue however self-esteem like incidence of childhood maltreatment above could provide a justification for the violence within a relationship. A person with low self-esteem and degraded sense of self-worth may justify intimate partner violence victimization through the belief that they deserve such behavior. Since people with low self-esteem tend to attribute negative life events to internal factors they may view the reason behind the violence towards them to be something within themselves rather than the fault of their partners thus preventing them from ending such relationship despite of increased incidence of victimization.

#### **IV. Adolescence attachment, exploration, and investment in relationships**

As noted before in this paper, adolescence is an important time in terms of attachment. During this period, there is a shift from parents to peers as the primary source of attachment. This shift is attributed to the gaining of ability of the adolescents to view their relationship with their parents in an objective manner and thus recognize that a lot of their attachment needs are going unfulfilled. Consequently, they realize that in some regards parents are deficient or rather insufficient as source of attachments thus prompting a shift to peers (Kobak and Duemmler, 1994). Transfer from parents to peers would also mean that these children are more likely to

form romantic relationship earlier than their counterpart. However, this shift from parents to peers does not occur at the same age for every child. There are certain factors, which might trigger an earlier transition. Among others, insecure attachment with their parents is perhaps the most important one (Hauser, Bell and O'Connor, 1994). Critical to the process of exploration of other sources of attachment is the realization that parent, as an attachment figures cannot fulfill all their attachment needs. When an adolescent is attached insecurely to their parents, it would be logical to expect that the process of seeking external attachment start sooner. In case of immigrants, one could argue that this early trigger is aided by the fact that not only they have insecure attachment with their parents but all their other sources of attachment including their extended family are left behind in the process of migration. Complete shift from parents to peers as source of attachments in securely attached adolescents is also delayed by the process of exploration. As already mentioned before in this paper, many adolescents still use their parents as their primary attachment figures while they explore their options in terms of peer group and formation of their self-identity Allen, (Hauser, Bell and O'Connor, 1994). However, such behavior is much more common in adolescent who are securely attached to their parent as they are more willing to explore different peer groups and identities. Secure attachment with parents provides the assurance that even in case of failure and disappointment, their attachment needs can be fulfilled through their parents. This is not unlike the behavior exhibited by secure infants in the strange situation experiment, which is abbreviated in table 1. Similar to their response to strange situation, secure adolescents when confronting the novel situation of adhering to a particular peer group/romantic partner and using them as attachment figures tend to explore more than their insecure counterparts and in face of disappointments are soothed by the presence of their parents (Cassidy and Shaver, 2008). Immigrant adolescents as established in above

sections mostly have insecure attachment styles thus do not have the luxury of falling back on their parents. Thus they tend to try out fewer options and try to use peers as primary source of attachment at a younger age. Cassidy and Shaver propose that (2008) this shift occurs relatively quicker in insecure adolescents because they are “easily frustrated because he or she does not expect to be heard or understood by a parent who have hard time tuning in accurately to the adolescents feelings and perspectives (p. 324).” This frustration is especially relevant for immigrant adolescents whose natural instinct of seeking autonomy from parents during this age is met by surprise and anger by their parents who seek proximity upon reunification after years of separation (Pottinger, 2006). Consequently, they would tend to actively reject parents as attachment figures (Orozco, Todorova, and Louie, 2002) and tend to turn to their peers or romantic partners to fulfill their attachment needs.

This already complicated transitional phase of adolescence is made more complex in the case of immigrant adolescents by the fact that they are adapting to new culture and environment including their peer group. Therefore, though they may seek attachment need from their peers this process could be made more difficult by the lack of peer acceptance. It is then vital for them in order to seek autonomy from their parents and complete the transition of using peers as their primary source of attachment, to gain the acceptance of their peer group. Among others, one possible avenue these adolescent might adopt to achieve this is by being involved in romantic relationships. Smith and Donnelly (2001) believe that romantic partnership help to reduce social anxiety among adolescents and thus induce a feeling of belongingness to their peer group. Similarly, they also believed that having a boyfriend or a girlfriend allowed them to expand their peer group through them thus increasing the likelihood of inducing feeling of acceptance. Researches have also pointed out that romantic relationships especially in early adolescence is a

vital tool for status upgrade among peers which in predicts better chances of acceptance among peers (Roscoe, Diana and Brooks, 1987). Thus there might be considerable pressure on immigrant adolescents to be in a romantic relationship.

There is little evidence to argue that there are increased chances of intimate partner violence on romantic relationships formed hastily with little exploration and under the pressure from peers. However, what these factors might explain is the reason why immigrant adolescents choose to remain in such relationships even if they are abusive. Since this a distinct possibility considering relationship violence among adolescents was found to be much more common than among adult couples with some samples revealing as many as 1 in every 3 teenagers involved in abusive relationship (Leaman and Gee, 2006) it becomes important to explore this phenomenon of dating violence.

For better deconstruction of this phenomenon it is important to understand what holds a relationship together and why people stick to particular relationships and not others. Perhaps, the easiest way to do this would be to go through the Investment model of close relationships. Formulate first by Rusbult and Buunk in 1993, it aims at explaining the factors that affect the commitment- a desire for continuity and a level of dependence- of a person to a particular relationship. They argue that commitment to a relationship is influenced not only by positive factors such as relationship satisfaction and partner compatibility but also by anticipation of negative factors that would come into play upon the termination of the relationship such as lack of acceptable alternatives. This argument is intriguing since it proposes that people may choose to be involved in a relationship even if they are highly dissatisfied with it if they believe there is no better alternative and the cost of breaking the relationship is higher than being in it. Among

others the cost of a relationship is assessed in terms of availability of alternatives, investment of time and effort into the relationship and the influence of the relationship on one's self identity and perception. These three factors are especially critical to come up with an explanation why immigrant adolescents may choose to stick to an abusive relationships. Using satisfaction of attachment needs as the primary motive of adolescent relationships and exploring this need in terms of three factors explained above it becomes clearer why immigrant adolescents may choose to be involved in a relationship despite of them being abusive.

First of all, the cost associated with ending a romantic relationship for immigrant adolescent is very high. The termination of such a relationship will end the fulfillment of their attachment needs through their romantic partner. Moreover, as mentioned above romantic relationships may be vital for peer acceptance and in absence of it they also run the possibility of losing peer acceptance. Since they tend to use their peers as the primary source of attachment in their lives, this would lead to them being starved off of their attachment needs. For immigrant adolescents who are adjusting and identifying themselves in a completely new environment, both the romantic relationship itself and the nature of the peer group that follows may be a major part of their new identity. Since, their self-concept is intertwined so intricately with the romantic relationship and influence on self-identity is a major investment, the cost of ending such relationship becomes even higher. Similarly the decision to stay in such relationships even if they are abusive is also influenced by lack of alternate source for the fulfillment of their attachment needs. Unlike adolescents with secure attachment to their parents these immigrants adolescents who have either no or highly insecure attachment to their parents cannot use their parents as major attachment figures in their lives in the absence of such romantic relationships. Since their peer group in their new environment is limited and other sources of attachment like

their caregivers, extended families and close friends are back in their native country and not actively present they would not have a source of attachment outside the context of these romantic relationships. Therefore in many cases, the cost of ending such a relationship without any significant alternatives for their attachment requirements overwrites the pain caused by the violence within the relationship thus compelling them to remain with their partners even when subjected to different forms of abuse.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations:**

The high frequency of insecure attachment style amongst the immigrant teens and the presence of the risk factors mentioned above increase the likelihood of immigrant adolescents being involved in abusive relationship. It needs to be acknowledged that the critical role that attachment style plays in involvement of immigrant adolescents in abusive relationships establishes such relationship violence as a unique phenomenon. The influence of attachment and separation patterns in case of immigrant adolescents not only differentiates it from general adolescent problems but also indicates it is more than just a reaction of the immigrant youth to drastic change in their environment and culture. It points at a deep lying issue and helps understand such violent relationships in terms of the separation from their parents inflicted by immigration and the tension such separations generates within the family. It helps to explain the attachment style they develop in terms of immigration related stressors and how they increase immigrant youth's vulnerability to be involved in an abusive relationship. Using attachment theory to understand abusive relationships among immigrant youth has some major significance as it not only broadens our theoretical conception of this issue but can also contribute to determine how we tackle it both in terms of therapy and policy.

Theoretically this paper puts forward the idea of explaining and understanding relationship violence in terms of attachments and separations. It is somewhat of a surprise that despite the presence of large number of studies (Hazan and Shaver, 1987; Feeney, 1999; Kuncze and Shaver; 1984) that explore romantic relationship in terms of attachment, there are hardly any that attempt to analyze intimate partner violence using attachment theory. If romantic relationship is to be accepted as another type of attachment bond then it would be logical to expect that attachment style would have a major effect on the how such relationships work. While some other popular models of romantic relationship may not use attachment theory as the basis, analysis of attachment needs may still be relevant. For instance, as described earlier in the paper when using the investment model of romantic relationship consideration of attachment needs as one of the major “investments” one puts into a relationship provides valuable insight into why people tend to persevere with abusive relationships. Therefore, while attachment theory in itself may not be sufficient to comprehend the complex process of intimate partner violence and its causes as well as consequences, study of attachments and separations does contribute significantly to develop a better understanding.

Similarly, in the light of evidence that point out as attachment and separation as underlying causes of abusive relationships in immigrant adolescent the strategy of the therapy needs to be reconsidered as well. Therapy needs to be directed at improving the attachment between the parent and the immigrant child. Particular emphasis needs to be focused on separation and steps need to be taken in order to soften the impact of such separations. For instance, as discussed earlier frequent visitations by the parents during the separation period helps to maintain the attachment between the parent and the child. Therefore, the parents need to be educated and encouraged to maintain close contact to their children during separation period.

If frequent visitation is not financially feasible contact can also be maintained through phone calls and video chatting. Moreover, Artico (2003) suggests that along with close contact sending their children gifts and pictures can also serve to maintain positive parent-child relationship during the time of separation.

Similarly, Suarez-Orozco et al. (2002) also point out that the substitute caregivers have an equally important in promoting the relationship between the biological parents and the child. It has been noted that clear explanations about the reason for their parent's departure highlighting the sacrifice they have made for their children and frequent reminders of the same can help to build a positive image of the parents despite the separation and thus prevent family conflict.

However, the children are not the only ones in need of education. Tensions and family conflicts also need to be avoided upon reunification. As discussed earlier it is often the cases that upon reunification parents often try to form close relationships with their children and often get angry and give out harsh punishments when the children are not very responsive. This behavior from the parents is a result of lack of knowledge about the natural tendency of children to pull away from their parents. If anything they need to learn that in their case this tendency is even more severe due to lack of proper attachment and all the years of separation. They have to be informed that they need to be patient and allow the children to explore other avenues however remaining available at all times according to their need.

The key to combating dating violence in immigrant adolescent lies in understanding their attachment patterns and attempts to improve parent-child relationships. The probability of making substantial progress should increase when these underlying causes are addressed rather than just the superficial ones.

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