

Positive Emotional Well-Being and Attachment Security among Adolescents in Selected Secondary Schools in Baidoa District, Somalia

Muhsin Ali Ibrahim^{1*} and Aloysius Tumukunde²

¹ Department of Social Work and Social Administration, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Kampala International University

² College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Kampala International University

*Corresponding author

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2026.1307000029>

Received: 03 July 2026; Accepted: 14 July 2026; Published: 23 July 2026

ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a period in which emotional functioning and close relationships develop side by side. In fragile settings, however, positive emotional strengths are often discussed less than distress and risk. Objective: This study examined the relationship between positive emotional well-being and attachment security among adolescents in selected secondary schools in Baidoa District, Somalia. Methodology: A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was combined with a correlational approach. Survey data were obtained from 360 adolescents drawn from six secondary schools, while interviews with students, teachers, school administrators and education officers provided contextual explanation. Positive emotional well-being was measured through happiness, self-acceptance, purpose in life and emotional regulation ability. Attachment security was assessed through trust, emotional connectedness and relationship stability. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation were used for the quantitative analysis, and interview material was analyzed thematically. Results: All four positive emotional well-being dimensions were positively and significantly related to attachment security. Emotional regulation showed the strongest relationship ($r = .768$, $p < .01$), followed by purpose in life ($r = .735$, $p < .01$), self-acceptance ($r = .701$, $p < .01$) and happiness ($r = .682$, $p < .01$). Interview participants linked calm responses during disagreement, future direction, self-acceptance and supportive school relationships with trust and more stable interpersonal bonds. Conclusion: Positive emotional well-being is closely associated with attachment security among school-going adolescents in Baidoa, although the cross-sectional design does not establish causation. Implications: School social work and psychosocial programmes should give practical attention to emotion regulation, goal setting, supportive teacher-student communication, peer support and referral pathways rather than relying only on general messages about happiness.

Keywords: Positive emotional well-being; Attachment security; Adolescents; Emotional regulation; Purpose in life; Baidoa.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a stage of rapid emotional and social change. Young people are learning to make decisions with greater independence, manage stronger emotions, and form relationships that increasingly extend beyond the family. These tasks do not occur separately. The way an adolescent understands and manages emotion can shape how disagreement is handled, whether support is sought, and how trust is maintained. The World Health Organization (2025) identifies adolescence as a formative period for developing coping, problem-solving, interpersonal and emotion-management skills, and stresses the importance of supportive family, school and community environments. Emotional well-being is therefore relevant not only to individual mental health but also to the way young people experience and sustain relationships.

The Somali context gives this relationship particular importance. UNICEF reported that drought, flood, conflict and displacement continued to affect children's protection and education in Somalia, and that only 21% of newly displaced children could access education compared with 39% of non-displaced children in the first half of 2023 (UNICEF, 2023). Baidoa has also received large displaced populations and has been repeatedly identified in humanitarian response reporting. These conditions do not mean that every adolescent in Baidoa has the same experience. They do show that schools operate within a wider environment where family routines, continuity of support and feelings of safety may be interrupted. In that setting, studying adolescents only through stress and emotional difficulty gives an incomplete picture. It is equally important to examine the strengths that may help them remain connected to other people.

This article focuses on positive emotional well-being, defined in the study through four dimensions: happiness, self-acceptance, purpose in life and emotional regulation ability. Self-acceptance and purpose in life are consistent with the psychological well-being tradition described by Ryff and Keyes (1995). Happiness captures day-to-day positive emotional experience, while emotion regulation reflects the ability to notice, express and manage emotions. These four dimensions were treated as related but distinguishable resources. This distinction is important because two adolescents may report similar overall well-being while relying on very different emotional strengths.

Attachment security, in this study, refers to trust, emotional connectedness and stability in important relationships. During adolescence, attachment is experienced in a wider social field than in early childhood. Parents continue to matter, while friendships and school relationships become increasingly central to daily emotional life. Allen and Miga (2010) argue that attachment in adolescence can be understood partly at the level of emotion regulation because peer relationships create frequent social and emotional challenges. This perspective is useful in Baidoa because the study did not reduce attachment to a single parent-child bond. Instead, the outcome concerned the adolescent's broader experience of trust, connection and relational stability.

Existing research generally supports a relationship between attachment and positive functioning. Mónaco, Schoeps, and Montoya-Castilla (2019) found that emotional competencies partly mediated the relationship between attachment to parents and adolescent well-being. Delgado et al. (2022), in a systematic review, concluded that parental attachment is related to the quality of adolescent peer relationships. More recent open-access evidence from Chile showed that secure parental attachment was associated with higher well-being across general, eudaimonic, hedonic and social dimensions, while attachment to friends also contributed to some dimensions of well-being (Valarezo-Bravo et al., 2024). These findings are useful, yet the social conditions and school environments in which adolescents live are different from Baidoa.

The gap addressed in this article is both contextual and analytical. Contextually, there is limited school-based empirical evidence from Baidoa on positive emotional resources and attachment security. Analytically, it is not enough to report that 'well-being' is related to attachment as though positive well-being were one undivided condition. An adolescent may be cheerful but react impulsively during conflict. Another may not describe daily life as especially happy yet may have a strong sense of purpose and manage emotions effectively. Separating happiness, self-acceptance, purpose and emotional regulation allows the analysis to show which dimensions are most closely associated with secure relational functioning.

The first objective of the broader thesis was therefore selected for this article. The study asks whether adolescents who report stronger positive emotional well-being also report stronger attachment security. It also compares the size of the four associations and uses interview material to interpret why some dimensions appear more closely connected to trust, emotional connectedness and stable relationships than others. Because the design is cross-sectional and correlational, the article does not claim that positive emotional well-being causes attachment security. The contribution is to identify a clear pattern in the Baidoa school context and to interpret that pattern from a social work and psychosocial practice perspective.

Objective of the Study

To determine the relationship between positive emotional well-being (happiness, self-acceptance, purpose in life and emotional regulation ability) and attachment security among adolescents in selected secondary schools in Baidoa District, Somalia.

Research Question

What is the relationship between positive emotional well-being and attachment security among adolescents in selected secondary schools in Baidoa District, Somalia?

Theoretical And Empirical Framework

The article is interpreted through Attachment Theory and contemporary adolescent attachment research. The central idea of attachment theory is that expectations about the self and significant others develop through repeated relational experience. During adolescence, these expectations are expressed not only in closeness to caregivers but also in the way young people manage social stress, seek support and preserve trust when relationships are challenged. Allen and Miga (2010) proposed that attachment security in adolescence can be reconsidered as a marker of social emotion-regulation capacity. Their argument is particularly relevant here because emotional regulation was one of the measured dimensions and later emerged as the strongest correlate of attachment security.

Emotion regulation and attachment are not the same construct. The proposed connection is developmental and relational. An adolescent who can identify what he or she is feeling, pause before reacting and recover after a strong emotional experience may be better able to preserve relationships during disagreement. The young person can still feel anger, fear or disappointment, but a strong emotion does not automatically become a damaging response. The opposite direction is also plausible: secure and supportive relationships may provide the conditions in which adolescents learn to regulate emotion. The design of this study cannot separate these directions, so the relationship is interpreted as potentially reciprocal rather than as a one-way causal pathway.

Broader evidence supports the social significance of attachment security. Delgado et al. (2022) reviewed research on parental attachment and peer relationships in adolescence and found consistent links between attachment quality and several aspects of peer functioning. Valarezo-Bravo et al. (2024) similarly reported that more secure parental attachment was associated with better well-being and with more secure attachment to friends. These findings help to explain why the Baidoa study measured attachment security through trust, emotional connectedness and relationship stability instead of treating attachment as an abstract personality label.

Positive emotional well-being was approached as a set of resources that may support these relational processes. Self-acceptance may reduce defensiveness and excessive self-criticism. A sense of purpose may provide direction and consistency in decision-making. Happiness may be associated with greater social openness and perceived support. Emotional regulation may help adolescents deal with interpersonal stress without escalating conflict. Mónaco et al. (2019) showed that emotional competencies have an important role in the association between parental attachment and adolescent well-being. Eadeh, Breau, and Nikolas (2021) also found, in a meta-analytic review, that psychosocial interventions focused on emotion regulation can improve adolescent emotion-regulation outcomes. Together, these studies support the view that emotional functioning is closely connected to how young people manage relationships.

The Baidoa setting adds a fragile-context school perspective. The adolescents in this study were not treated as a single 'conflict-affected' group, and the first objective did not measure individual exposure to conflict. The contextual argument is narrower. National humanitarian evidence shows that Somali children and schools function within a society affected by displacement, poverty, climatic shocks and insecurity (UNICEF, 2023). Under such conditions, emotional regulation, future direction and access to supportive relationships may carry particular practical value. This possibility provides a context for examining why emotional regulation and purpose in life may show stronger relationships with attachment security than everyday happiness.

The framework guided two expectations. First, all four dimensions of positive emotional well-being were expected to relate positively to attachment security. Second, the size of the relationships was expected to vary because each emotional resource operates differently in daily social life. The quantitative analysis tested the pattern and compared the four coefficients. The qualitative interviews were then used to understand how students and adults described the relationship in ordinary terms such as controlling anger, avoiding unnecessary conflict, having future goals, feeling valued and talking to trusted people.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Study Setting

The broader study used a convergent parallel mixed-methods design together with a correlational research design. The correlational component was appropriate for Objective One because the study sought to examine the direction and strength of relationships between positive emotional well-being and attachment security without manipulating either variable. Quantitative survey data provided comparable scores across a large student sample. Qualitative interviews added explanation and context. The study was conducted in six secondary schools in Baidoa District: Baidoa Secondary School, Ma'ruf Secondary School, Al Qalam Secondary School, Salahudin Secondary School, Al-Basha'r Secondary School and Al-Cayn Secondary School.

Population, Sample and Sampling

The six selected schools had an estimated target population of 4,300 students. The broader study calculated a survey sample of 366 adolescents and distributed questionnaires across the selected schools. Stratified random sampling was used for the adolescent survey so that students from different schools and grade levels could be represented. Of the 366 questionnaires distributed, 360 usable questionnaires were returned, representing a 98.4% response rate. Twenty interview participants were initially targeted and 18 were reached, representing a 90% interview response rate. Qualitative participants were purposively selected from students, teachers, school administrators and district-level education officers because these groups could describe school relationships, student emotional functioning and psychosocial support from different positions.

Measurement of Positive Emotional Well-Being

The positive emotional well-being section contained 24 Likert-type items organized around happiness, self-acceptance, purpose in life and emotional regulation ability. Each dimension was represented by six items. Self-acceptance and purpose in life were informed by the psychological well-being literature associated with Ryff and Keyes (1995). The study's operationalization also included happiness and emotion regulation in order to capture day-to-day positive affect and the student's ability to notice, express and manage emotions. Responses were scored on a five-point scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Higher scores indicated stronger positive emotional well-being on the relevant dimension.

Measurement of Attachment Security

Attachment security was measured through questionnaire items covering demonstration of trust, emotional connectedness and stability in relationships. The items assessed whether adolescents perceived important relationships as reliable, emotionally close and relatively stable. Higher scores represented stronger trust, connection and perceived relational security.

Validity and Reliability Procedures

Content validity was examined by three experts from the Department of Applied Psychology at Kampala International University. In the thesis records, expert content-validity ratings for the positive emotional well-being scale ranged from 0.75 to 0.81, while ratings for the attachment scale ranged from 0.89 to 0.92. The questionnaire was piloted in a non-target school. Internal consistency testing using Cronbach's alpha and a two-week test-retest procedure were incorporated into the broader reliability process. The thesis specified a minimum

acceptable alpha of .70. This article deliberately does not insert subscale alpha coefficients that were not visible in the objective-one results table available for manuscript preparation.

Data Collection

Questionnaires were administered to adolescents in the school setting after the purpose of the study and the conditions of participation had been explained. Respondents completed the instrument independently, with research assistants available to clarify wording without suggesting answers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted face to face in private settings with selected participants. The interview guide covered emotional well-being, relationships with peers and teachers, school support, coping, family context and strategies for improving adolescent well-being. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed for thematic analysis.

Data Analysis

Survey data were coded and analyzed in SPSS. Means and standard deviations were used to describe each positive emotional well-being dimension. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were used to examine the relationship between happiness, self-acceptance, purpose in life, emotional regulation and attachment security. Statistical significance was evaluated at $p < .01$ for the reported correlation table. Interpretation considered both significance and the relative magnitude of coefficients. Interview transcripts were coded thematically. For this article, themes directly relevant to Objective One were compared with the ranking of the correlation coefficients so that qualitative evidence could explain, qualify or challenge the statistical pattern.

Ethical Considerations

The study obtained ethical clearance through the relevant university ethics process and permissions from education authorities and participating schools before data collection. Because the research involved adolescents, parental or legal-guardian consent and adolescent assent procedures were followed. Participation was voluntary, respondents could withdraw or skip questions, and codes were used instead of personal names. The study also documented non-maleficence procedures, including careful wording of emotionally sensitive questions and access to school counselors or support persons if a participant experienced distress. Cultural and religious sensitivity was considered in the language and administration of the instruments.

FINDINGS

Response Rate and Profile of Survey Respondents

Of the 366 questionnaires distributed, 360 were returned and usable, producing a survey response rate of 98.4%. Eighteen of 20 planned interview participants were reached, giving an interview response rate of 90%. The survey respondents were drawn from all six selected schools. Males represented 55.6% of the sample and females 44.4%. The largest age group was 17-18 years (36.1%), followed by 15-16 years (33.3%), 13-14 years (19.4%) and 19 years or above (11.1%). Students were also distributed across Form One to Form Four. This spread matters because the observed relationships were not generated by a single school or class group dominating the sample.

Category	Group	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	160	44.4%
Gender	Male	200	55.6%
Age	13-14	70	19.4%
Age	15-16	120	33.3%
Age	17-18	130	36.1%

Age	19 and above	40	11.1%
Class	Form One	90	25.0%
Class	Form Two	100	27.8%
Class	Form Three	95	26.4%
Class	Form Four	75	20.8%

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by gender, age and class level (N = 360). Source: Primary data, 2026.

Descriptive Pattern of Positive Emotional Well-Being

The four dimensions were present at different levels. Purpose in life had the highest dimension mean ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.15$). Self-acceptance followed with a mean of 3.47 ($SD = 1.19$), while happiness and emotional regulation each had a dimension mean of 3.42 ($SD = 1.19$). The similar average scores for happiness and emotional regulation should not be interpreted as meaning that the two dimensions behaved in the same way. Their item patterns and their relationships with attachment security were different.

Happiness was moderate overall. The highest-rated item was 'I feel happy in my daily life' ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.15$). The weakest happiness item concerned hopefulness about most aspects of life ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.24$). This difference is useful for interpretation. Adolescents could report present-day positive emotion while being less certain about the future. In other words, feeling reasonably happy today did not automatically mean strong optimism about what comes next.

Self-acceptance also showed an uneven pattern. Accepting oneself after making mistakes was relatively high ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.10$), and feeling comfortable with oneself was high ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.16$). By contrast, feeling at peace with one's personal history was lower ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.25$). This suggests that some respondents could recognize and accept their current selves while still carrying unresolved feelings about earlier experiences.

For social work practice, this distinction is important because present confidence does not necessarily mean that personal history has been emotionally settled.

Purpose in life was the strongest descriptive dimension. The statement 'I have goals in life that give me direction' recorded a mean of 3.92 ($SD = 1.08$), and feeling that life has meaning and purpose recorded a mean of 3.72 ($SD = 1.14$). The lowest item in this dimension concerned being motivated by a larger vision for life ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.18$), which still remained above the midpoint. Many adolescents therefore appeared to have concrete goals and a sense of direction, even where a wider long-term vision was not equally strong.

Emotional regulation was moderate overall but contained clear strengths and weaknesses. Awareness of emotions as they arise was relatively high ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.14$), and the ability to change one's thinking to manage emotions was also high ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.16$).

The weakest items concerned recovering quickly after strong emotions ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.24$) and controlling reactions when upset ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.23$). In practical terms, many students appeared able to recognize what they were feeling and to describe ways of managing emotion, but a smaller proportion found it easy to regulate reactions in the moment or recover quickly after intense emotion.

Dimension	Mean	SD	Highest-rated item	Item M	Lowest-rated item (M)
Happiness	3.42	1.19	Happy in daily life	3.72	Hopeful about life (3.18)
Self-acceptance	3.47	1.19	Accept self after mistakes	3.88	Peace with personal history (3.17)

Purpose in life	3.62	1.15	Goals give direction	3.92	Larger life vision (3.47)
Emotional regulation	3.42	1.19	Aware of emotions	3.64	Recover after strong emotions (3.18)

Table 2: Descriptive profile of positive emotional well-being dimensions. Source: Primary data, 2026.

Relationship between Positive Emotional Well-Being and Attachment Security

The central finding is that all four positive emotional well-being dimensions were positively and significantly associated with attachment security at $p < .01$. Emotional regulation had the largest coefficient ($r = .768$). Purpose in life was second ($r = .735$), followed by self-acceptance ($r = .701$) and happiness ($r = .682$).

The ranking deserves attention. If the article reported only that every p value was significant, an important part of the result would be lost. Emotional regulation and happiness had the same descriptive dimension mean of 3.42, yet emotional regulation showed a much stronger relationship with attachment security. The average level of a positive emotional resource is therefore not the same as its relational relevance. In this sample, the ability to manage emotions was more closely aligned with trust, connectedness and relationship stability than the frequency of positive feeling.

Purpose in life also stood out. It was the highest-rated positive well-being dimension and the second strongest correlate of attachment security. This combination suggests that future direction may have both an individual and relational meaning for Baidoa adolescents. A sense of purpose may give a young person consistency in choices and behavior, which can make relationships more predictable. This interpretation is supported by the interview material presented below.

Self-acceptance produced a strong relationship with attachment security. The descriptive items show that acceptance after mistakes was stronger than peace with personal history. The correlation should therefore not be read as evidence that the adolescents were free from difficult memories or self-doubt. A more cautious interpretation is that adolescents who were more able to accept themselves, including strengths and weaknesses, also tended to report stronger trust and connection with others.

Happiness had the smallest coefficient of the four, but $r = .682$ still represents a strong positive relationship. The result should not be minimized. Adolescents who reported more positive emotion also tended to report more secure relational experiences. Happiness may have ranked lower because it can be especially sensitive to immediate circumstances such as academic success, friendship events or daily stress, whereas purpose and regulation may operate as more stable organizing resources. This is an interpretation of the pattern, not a causal conclusion.

Variable	Mean	SD	r with attachment security	p	Rank
Happiness	21.350	5.210	.682**	< .01	4
Self-acceptance	20.480	5.045	.701**	< .01	3
Purpose in life	21.760	5.332	.735**	< .01	2
Emotional regulation	20.950	5.180	.768**	< .01	1

Table 3: Pearson correlations between positive emotional well-being dimensions and attachment security (N = 360). Attachment security: M = 52.430, SD = 10.215. ** $p < .01$. Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Qualitative Interpretation of the Statistical Pattern

The interview material gave the strongest support to the emotional-regulation result. Teachers and students repeatedly described regulation in the language of conflict. One teacher explained that students who manage emotions during disagreements are better able to maintain friendships and respect authority. A student stated

that controlling anger and remaining calm helped in maintaining friendships and avoiding misunderstandings. This is a practical description of how regulation may become visible as attachment security. The relational benefit does not come from never feeling anger. It comes from preventing a strong emotion from automatically becoming a damaging response.

Purpose in life was also discussed in relational terms. School administrators described students with clear goals as more disciplined and more likely to maintain stable relationships with teachers and peers. Future aspirations were linked with avoiding negative peer pressure and choosing more meaningful relationships. These accounts suggest that purpose may provide behavioral direction. An adolescent who has a clearer idea of what he or she wants to achieve may be less willing to risk important relationships through repeated impulsive conflict. The interviews do not prove a mechanism, but they provide a plausible explanation for the second-highest correlation.

Interviews on self-acceptance focused on confidence and conflict. One student explained that accepting personal strengths and weaknesses helped in avoiding unnecessary conflict and promoted understanding with peers. Teachers similarly described confident students as more willing to build strong bonds and less likely to engage in negative behavior. These responses suggest that self-acceptance may reduce the need to interpret every disagreement as a threat to the self. Where an adolescent is less defensive, there may be more room for apology, compromise and continued connection.

Happiness appeared in the interviews as a socially embedded experience. Students linked happiness to friendship, academic success and feeling supported at school. One adolescent said that feeling happy and supported made it easier to trust friends and teachers. This wording shows the difficulty of separating happiness from relationships in a cross-sectional study. Supportive relationships may contribute to happiness, and happiness may make social interaction easier. The positive correlation can therefore be understood as a pattern of co-occurrence rather than a one-way pathway.

A final theme concerned the school environment. Participants mentioned counseling, mentorship, peer support, open classroom communication and positive teacher-student relationships. A student explained that a friendly school environment created a sense of safety and connection. Another said that talking to a trusted teacher or friend helped them feel better and maintain good relationships. These accounts shift the interpretation away from the idea that emotional well-being is only an individual responsibility. The social environment can either support or undermine the emotional skills that adolescents bring into relationships.

DISCUSSION

The study found a consistent positive relationship between positive emotional well-being and attachment security, but the most informative result is the order of the four dimensions. Emotional regulation was the strongest correlate, purpose in life came second, self-acceptance third and happiness fourth. This order provides a more specific answer than the general statement that 'well-being matters.' It suggests that, within the selected Baidoa schools, the positive emotional resources most closely connected to secure relationships are those that help adolescents manage social pressure and organize behavior over time.

The emotional-regulation result is consistent with the adolescent attachment perspective described by Allen and Miga (2010). Their work argues that adolescence brings frequent emotion-regulation challenges across peer and social contexts. The Baidoa results reflect that idea clearly. The largest coefficient was not for feeling cheerful; it was for managing emotional responses. Interview participants also located regulation in situations where attachment security can be tested: anger, misunderstanding, disagreement and respect for authority. The convergence between the statistical ranking and the interview accounts strengthens the interpretation that emotion regulation has direct relational relevance in the study setting.

The descriptive emotion-regulation findings add an important detail. Awareness of emotions and changing one's thinking to manage feelings were rated more strongly than controlling reactions when upset or recovering quickly after intense emotion. Knowing that one is angry is not the same as successfully managing behavior while angry. This points to a possible gap between emotional awareness and in-the-moment regulation. Eadeh

et al. (2021) reviewed emotion-regulation-focused psychosocial interventions for adolescents and found overall benefits for regulation outcomes. For Baidoa schools, the practical lesson is that students may benefit from rehearsal-based skills such as pausing, identifying triggers, reframing thoughts, choosing a response and repairing a relationship after conflict. General advice to 'stay calm' is unlikely to be enough.

Purpose in life had the second strongest correlation and the highest descriptive mean. The item on having goals that give direction was especially strong. Interview participants associated future goals with discipline, resistance to negative peer pressure and stable relationships. One interpretation is that purpose provides continuity. Relationships are more likely to feel stable when an adolescent's behavior is relatively predictable and guided by goals rather than changing completely with immediate social pressure. Purpose may also affect the type of peers an adolescent chooses and the amount of conflict he or she is willing to tolerate. The study did not directly test these pathways, but the consistency between the quantitative and qualitative evidence makes them reasonable questions for future longitudinal research.

The purpose finding must also be interpreted carefully in a fragile setting. It would be easy to romanticize resilience by suggesting that adolescents simply need stronger goals. That is not the argument of this article. UNICEF's humanitarian reporting shows that Somali children face structural pressures that cannot be solved through personal motivation alone (UNICEF, 2023). Goal setting may support emotional direction, but it does not remove poverty, displacement, insecurity or gaps in services. The practical implication is two-sided: help adolescents develop purpose while also strengthening the school and social conditions that allow goals to be pursued. Social work becomes weaker when it asks young people to adapt to hardship without addressing the environment around them.

Self-acceptance was also strongly related to attachment security. This is compatible with the psychological well-being framework of Ryff and Keyes (1995) and with Mónaco et al. (2019), who found that emotional competencies were relevant to the relationship between attachment and adolescent well-being. The Baidoa item pattern gives the result additional local meaning. Adolescents scored relatively high on accepting themselves after mistakes but lower on being at peace with personal history. This difference suggests that self-acceptance may be developing alongside unresolved emotional experiences. Interview descriptions of reduced defensiveness and fewer unnecessary conflicts fit this pattern. An adolescent does not need a perfect life story to relate securely; what may matter is having a sufficiently stable sense of self during disagreement.

Happiness showed the smallest correlation, although the relationship remained strong. This finding is useful because it prevents the discussion from equating secure attachment with constant positive feeling. Happiness matters, but the data suggest that secure relationships may depend more strongly on what adolescents do when emotions become difficult and whether they have a stable sense of direction. Valarezo-Bravo et al. (2024) reported that secure attachment was linked to multiple dimensions of well-being and that friendship attachment contributed particularly to eudaimonic and social well-being. Their findings also suggest that immediate positive feeling and deeper purpose-related well-being should not be treated as identical. The Baidoa results point in a similar direction.

The qualitative evidence suggests that the relationship may be bidirectional. Students described feeling happy because of friendships and academic success, and they said that supportive school relationships made trust easier. At the same time, they described happiness and calmness as helping them interact more positively. Mónaco et al. (2019) and Valarezo-Bravo et al. (2024) both demonstrate how attachment and well-being can be connected through emotional and social processes. The present study therefore avoids language suggesting a simple one-way effect. Positive emotional well-being and attachment security appear to reinforce one another within the social life of adolescents.

The school environment emerged as the setting where these processes are visible. Participants did not describe emotional well-being only as a private state. They talked about trusted teachers, counseling, peer support, open communication and mentorship. This closely reflects the WHO's position that protective and supportive environments in the family, school and wider community are important for adolescent mental well-being (World Health Organization, 2025). In Baidoa, a school-based response is particularly practical because schools bring

together adolescents, peers and adults who can notice changes in behavior and relationships. Schools cannot replace specialized mental health services, but they can provide early support, strengthen everyday emotional skills and create referral pathways.

The findings have a specific implication for social work practice. A social worker or school counselor may be tempted to begin with the adolescent's problem: anger, withdrawal, conflict or poor trust. The results suggest that assessment should also ask about strengths. Does the adolescent know what he or she wants to achieve? Can the young person name emotions? What happens immediately before an angry reaction? Is there one trusted adult or friend? Can the adolescent accept a mistake without describing the whole self as a failure? These questions connect the four positive well-being dimensions to practical assessment. They also help move intervention away from labeling and toward skill-building and supportive relationships.

The article also contributes to the interpretation of Attachment Theory in a Somali school context. Traditional attachment accounts emphasize caregiving and internal working models. Those ideas remain relevant, but the Baidoa interviews repeatedly pointed to teachers, peers and school climate. This does not replace the family in attachment theory. Instead, it shows that adolescents experience relational security across several daily environments. The finding is consistent with the growing importance of peer relationships in adolescence identified by Delgado et al. (2022). Future studies in Somalia could separately measure parent attachment, peer attachment and teacher connectedness to identify whether positive emotional well-being has the same relationship with each type of bond.

A further contribution is methodological. The numerical findings alone show a strong set of correlations, but the interviews help explain why emotional regulation is ranked above happiness. Without the qualitative evidence, the analysis might simply state that $r = .768$ is larger than $r = .682$. The participants' accounts translate that difference into everyday behavior: controlling anger, remaining calm, avoiding misunderstandings and maintaining friendships. This is the value of integrating the two data strands. It does not make the correlation causal, but it produces a more grounded interpretation of what the coefficient may represent in adolescents' lives.

At the same time, the strength of the correlations should be treated with care. All measures were self-reported in the same broad study and collected at one point in time. Shared method variance and the possibility of socially desirable responses may have increased the observed associations. Adolescents who generally viewed themselves positively may also have rated their relationships positively. The mixed-methods design reduces, but does not remove, this concern. The interviews provide convergence at the thematic level, yet they do not independently verify the direction of the statistical relationships.

Overall, the findings support a differentiated view of positive emotional well-being. Happiness, self-acceptance, purpose and emotional regulation all matter, but they do not appear equally related to attachment security. Emotional regulation and purpose in life were especially prominent. For policy and practice, this means that programmes should not use 'well-being' as a vague umbrella term. A programme can be explicit about which capacity it intends to strengthen, how that capacity may affect relationships and how change will be assessed.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between positive emotional well-being and attachment security among 360 adolescents in six selected secondary schools in Baidoa District. The findings show a clear and consistent positive pattern. Emotional regulation, purpose in life, self-acceptance and happiness were all significantly associated with attachment security. Emotional regulation showed the strongest relationship, followed by purpose in life, self-acceptance and happiness.

The main conclusion is not that happy adolescents automatically develop secure attachment. The findings are more specific. Adolescents who reported stronger ability to manage emotions, a clearer sense of direction, greater acceptance of themselves and more positive emotional experience also tended to report greater trust, emotional connectedness and relational stability. The qualitative interviews gave this pattern practical meaning by

describing calm responses during conflict, future goals, lower defensiveness, supportive teachers and trusted peers.

Because the design was cross-sectional, the study cannot determine whether positive emotional well-being strengthens attachment security, secure relationships improve well-being, or both processes occur together. The article therefore concludes that the two constructs are closely associated in the Baidoa school context. Longitudinal research is needed to test direction over time.

Practical Implications and Recommendations

For school management, the first priority should be to move from occasional counseling toward a simple school psychosocial support structure. Each school should identify trained staff responsible for guidance and referral, provide a confidential space for student support, and establish a clear process for referring students who need more specialized care. This recommendation responds directly to interview participants who linked trusted adults and supportive school environments with stronger connection and trust.

For teachers and school counselors, emotional regulation should be taught as a practical skill. Short sessions can focus on recognizing emotional triggers, naming the emotion, pausing before reacting, changing unhelpful thoughts, choosing a response and repairing a relationship after conflict. The weaker descriptive scores on controlling reactions and recovering after strong emotions suggest that these are more urgent skills than simple emotional awareness.

Purpose-focused guidance should be integrated into mentoring and life-skills activities. Students can be supported to identify realistic education and life goals, break them into short-term steps and review progress. The aim is not to place the burden of structural hardship on adolescents. Rather, clear direction can be used as one protective emotional resource while schools and social-service actors continue to address external barriers.

Self-acceptance work should include reflection on mistakes, strengths, weaknesses and personal history. The results show that adolescents were relatively able to accept themselves after mistakes but less likely to report peace with their personal history. School social workers and counselors should therefore avoid assuming that confident behavior means earlier experiences have been resolved. Support should remain sensitive to grief, disruption and other difficult experiences without forcing disclosure.

Peer-support and mentorship programmes should be carefully structured. Students repeatedly described friendships as sources of happiness, connection and coping. Schools can create supervised peer-support groups, student mentoring systems and collaborative activities that encourage respectful communication. Clear safeguarding rules are necessary so that peer support complements, rather than replaces, professional or adult support.

For education authorities and organizations working in adolescent psychosocial support, programme indicators should be more specific than a general 'well-being' score. Monitoring can separately assess emotional regulation, purpose, self-acceptance, positive affect and relational trust. The present findings show that these dimensions do not relate to attachment security with equal strength. More specific indicators would allow programmes to identify what is actually changing.

Limitations and Directions for Further Research

The study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design does not establish temporal or causal direction. Second, the quantitative measures were based on adolescent self-report, which may be influenced by common-method variance and social desirability. Third, the article focuses on selected secondary schools in Baidoa and should not be generalized to all Somali adolescents, particularly those who are out of school. Fourth, Objective One examined positive emotional well-being and did not control for negative emotional states, family structure, displacement history or socioeconomic conditions in the reported correlation table.

Future research should follow adolescents over time to examine whether changes in emotion regulation and purpose precede changes in attachment security. Studies should also compare parent, peer and teacher-related attachment separately. Intervention research could test brief school-based emotion-regulation and purpose-building programmes using pre-intervention and post-intervention measures. Finally, out-of-school adolescents and displaced adolescents should be included in dedicated studies because school-based samples may underrepresent young people facing the greatest barriers.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance and study permissions were obtained through the relevant university and education-authority processes before data collection. Parents or legal guardians provided consent and adolescent participants provided assent. Participation was voluntary, respondents could decline or withdraw, and codes rather than names were used in the study records. Sensitive questions were administered carefully, and support or referral through school support persons was available where needed.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this article form part of the author's master's research dataset. De-identified data may be made available by the corresponding author for legitimate academic purposes, subject to ethical, confidentiality and institutional requirements.

conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

Muhsin Ali Ibrahim: Conceptualization, investigation, data collection, formal analysis, interpretation and manuscript drafting. Aloysius Tumukunde: Academic supervision, methodological guidance, critical review and manuscript revision. Both authors are expected to review and approve the final manuscript before publication.

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