

## Identifying Cultural Pathways of Parent–Child Attachment Development

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study aimed to explore and identify the cultural pathways that shape the development of parent–child attachment among families from diverse cultural backgrounds living in Canada.

**Methods and Materials:** The research adopted a qualitative, phenomenological design to capture parents' lived experiences of attachment formation within multicultural contexts. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 23 participants (13 mothers and 10 fathers) representing South Asian, East Asian, Middle Eastern, European, and Indigenous cultural groups. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, and interviews continued until theoretical saturation was reached. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and focused on parental beliefs, emotional expression, cultural transmission, and adaptation to Canadian norms. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically using NVivo 14 software following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework.

**Findings:** Analysis revealed three main themes—Cultural Interpretations of Emotional Bonding, Migration and Cultural Adaptation in Parenting, and Pathways of Attachment Formation. These themes encompassed 17 subthemes that described how cultural values, intergenerational beliefs, and migration experiences influence emotional expression and attachment behaviors. The findings showed that while traditional collectivist cultures emphasized caregiving through protection, respect, and shared rituals, integration into Canadian society encouraged more open emotional communication and autonomy-promoting parenting.

**Conclusion:** The study concludes that parent–child attachment development among Canadian families is a culturally dynamic process influenced by enculturation, migration, and social adaptation. Recognizing multiple cultural pathways of attachment can enhance culturally sensitive family interventions, parenting education, and cross-cultural counseling practices.

**Keywords:** Parent–child attachment; cultural pathways; cross-cultural parenting; migration; emotional bonding

## 1 Introduction

Parent-child attachment represents one of the most fundamental and enduring bonds shaping emotional, social, and cognitive development across the lifespan. Originating from Bowlby's early conceptualization, attachment theory has been extensively studied within Western frameworks emphasizing emotional availability, security, and individual autonomy. However, recent cross-cultural perspectives highlight that attachment development is not universal but deeply influenced by social norms, family systems, and cultural pathways that define parenting practices and emotional communication (Bakaraki et al., 2024). The ways in which parents interpret and express affection, sensitivity, and protection are culturally embedded, reflecting broader value systems such as collectivism, interdependence, or individualism (Hollan & Nutsubidze, 2023; Seldikov & Salykova, 2022). Understanding how attachment unfolds within different sociocultural contexts is therefore essential to building a comprehensive and inclusive model of relational development.

Research on cultural correlates of attachment has demonstrated that emotional bonds between parents and children vary across societies not merely in degree but in form and function (Sakman & Sümer, 2024). For instance, North American and Western European models prioritize secure attachment through verbal affirmation and responsive communication, whereas many Asian and Indigenous traditions value non-verbal care, respect, and duty as expressions of love (Neckoway et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2024). The divergence in these cultural expressions has led scholars to call for a contextualized understanding of attachment security that accounts for collective caregiving systems, kinship ties, and spiritual values (Bakaraki et al., 2024; Hoenicka et al., 2022). In societies where caregiving is shared among extended family members or community figures, such as in many collectivist settings, attachment representations are distributed across multiple caregivers rather than confined to a single dyadic relationship (Rodríguez-González et al., 2023).

Cultural psychology has contributed significantly to reframing attachment theory within the context of enculturation and socialization. Enculturation—the process through which children internalize the beliefs, norms, and emotional scripts of their culture—shapes how they perceive parental sensitivity and closeness (Maftuhah et al., 2024). For example, a child raised in a family that values emotional

restraint may interpret a parent's quiet presence as caring, whereas in a culture emphasizing expressiveness, love may be communicated through verbal affirmation and physical affection. In this regard, attachment security must be evaluated through culturally congruent criteria that reflect the relational logic of the society in which it develops (Wang et al., 2022).

In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on how global migration, multiculturalism, and intercultural exposure reshape family attachment dynamics. Immigrant parents often navigate the challenge of integrating their heritage-based parenting models with the emotional expectations of the host culture (Inagawa & Nakao, 2023; Patel et al., 2023). For example, Chinese-Canadian and South Asian parents may maintain values of filial piety and obedience while simultaneously adopting Canadian norms of emotional openness and autonomy (Williams et al., 2024; Zhu et al., 2020). This bicultural adaptation process can result in hybrid attachment practices where parents selectively integrate elements of both cultural frameworks to meet the emotional and developmental needs of their children (Li, 2022).

Attachment models are also influenced by social systems and collective histories. In Russian and Eastern European contexts, for instance, studies indicate that historical instability and social transitions have shaped parental attitudes toward dependence and emotional regulation (Gerlach et al., 2022; Muhamedrahimov, 2022). Similarly, research in Turkey and Central Asia shows that attachment-related values are embedded in collectivist ideals emphasizing loyalty and intergenerational continuity (Ailauova, 2021; Sakman & Sümer, 2024). These findings underscore that attachment cannot be detached from its sociocultural environment; instead, it reflects a dynamic interplay between personal emotional needs and the cultural scripts that define appropriate relational behavior.

A growing body of evidence further supports the notion that parenting behaviors mediate the relationship between family risk and attachment outcomes, with cultural context serving as a moderating factor (Gerlach et al., 2022). For example, in families where interdependence and mutual support are normative, children may perceive stricter parental control as a sign of involvement rather than intrusion. Conversely, in more individualistic cultures, such behaviors may be interpreted as overprotective or restrictive (Kafetsios, 2021). This cultural relativity of attachment meaning has inspired a shift toward more pluralistic models

of parent–child relationships that recognize multiple pathways to emotional security (Zayas & Sakman, 2020).

Recent advances in attachment research also emphasize the bidirectional nature of relationships, acknowledging that children actively shape the attachment process through reciprocal interactions. Cross-cultural studies reveal that children’s emotional responses, coping strategies, and relational expectations differ according to culturally prescribed parenting norms (Huang, 2025). For instance, Japanese children are often socialized to express dependence as a relational virtue, while Western children are encouraged to pursue independence and assertiveness (Inagawa & Nakao, 2023). Such cultural conditioning contributes to diverse emotional profiles and attachment behaviors that cannot be adequately captured through a single theoretical lens (Seldikov & Salykova, 2022).

Within multicultural societies like Canada, cultural pluralism provides a unique context for exploring how attachment develops amid intersecting cultural identities. Immigrant families must continuously negotiate between inherited cultural scripts and the normative frameworks of the host society (Hollan & Nutsunidze, 2023). The exposure to diverse parenting philosophies allows parents and children to reinterpret attachment cues—blending emotional warmth, respect, and autonomy into new hybrid models (Dybach, 2024). This dynamic process often results in what scholars term “cultural pathways of attachment,” wherein attachment formation becomes an adaptive, culturally situated process rather than a fixed developmental outcome (Bakaraki et al., 2024).

Moreover, digital globalization and transnational communication have expanded the ways families maintain emotional closeness across distances. Video calls, social media, and online communication now serve as tools for sustaining attachment with family members abroad, reshaping traditional notions of proximity and caregiving (Chen et al., 2024). Such transformations reveal that attachment is both biologically grounded and culturally redefined in the context of technological and social change. Similarly, cultural conceptology—the shared systems of meaning that guide communication and behavior—frames how individuals understand attachment-related emotions and obligations (Seldikov & Salykova, 2022).

In addition to sociocultural and technological factors, emotional well-being and relationship satisfaction are deeply linked to attachment orientations shaped by culture (Rodríguez-González et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2020). Cross-national research demonstrates that in collectivist societies,

emotional security often stems from fulfilling social expectations, whereas in individualist societies, it is tied to personal fulfillment and self-expression (Hoenicka et al., 2022; Tan et al., 2021). Thus, understanding attachment within diverse cultural frameworks requires recognizing that emotional security may be rooted in interdependence, harmony, and duty rather than autonomy alone (Kafetsios, 2021; Zayas & Sakman, 2020).

An important but often overlooked aspect concerns Indigenous and First Nations perspectives on attachment, which emphasize interconnectedness, spirituality, and community caregiving (Neckoway et al., 2020). These models challenge Western individualism by framing attachment as a collective process involving multiple caregivers, natural environments, and ancestral relationships. Such holistic perspectives expand the scope of attachment theory beyond dyadic bonds to include broader relational ecosystems.

Cross-cultural studies further indicate that parental bonding patterns in adulthood reflect early experiences shaped by cultural values and social structures (Hoenicka et al., 2022). For example, Mediterranean and East Asian adults often recall parental affection in terms of protection and sacrifice rather than open emotional communication. These retrospective accounts demonstrate that attachment models are intergenerationally transmitted through culturally sanctioned forms of love and duty (Muhamedrahimov, 2022; Rodríguez-González et al., 2023).

Educational and pedagogical research also highlights the importance of developing cross-cultural competence to support healthy attachment in increasingly diverse societies (Ailauova, 2021; Dybach, 2024). Teachers and counselors are encouraged to cultivate awareness of cultural variations in family attachment practices to avoid ethnocentric bias in interpreting parent–child dynamics (Chen et al., 2025; Patel et al., 2023). Such cultural sensitivity ensures that educational and clinical interventions align with the emotional realities of multicultural families, fostering more inclusive support systems.

Furthermore, collective experiences such as pandemics or social crises influence attachment orientations at a societal level, revealing the intersection between cultural orientation, stress regulation, and group cohesion (Kafetsios, 2021). During periods of threat, collectivist cultures may display stronger communal attachment patterns that buffer against isolation, whereas individualistic societies often rely on self-regulation and personal coping mechanisms. This interplay

between culture and attachment underscores the adaptive value of relational flexibility in navigating global challenges.

Finally, recent integrative frameworks propose that attachment is best understood as a *cultural ecosystem*—a dynamic field shaped by enculturation, historical continuity, social context, and emotional learning (Maftuhah et al., 2024; Seldikov & Salykova, 2022). Within this ecosystem, parenting practices and child emotional responses are mutually constituted, continuously adapting to environmental and cultural shifts. As researchers increasingly examine diverse populations and hybrid cultural settings, it becomes evident that attachment pathways cannot be universalized but must be interpreted within their sociocultural and historical contexts (Huang, 2025; Wang et al., 2022).

Therefore, the present study aims to identify and interpret the cultural pathways through which parent–child attachment develops among families in Canada, focusing on how cultural meanings, migration experiences, and emotional practices shape attachment formation.

## 2 Methods and Materials

### 2.1 Study Design and Participants

This study adopted a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore the cultural pathways through which parent–child attachment develops within diverse Canadian families. The focus of this approach was to capture participants' lived experiences, beliefs, and culturally embedded parenting practices that shape emotional bonding and attachment. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling to ensure variation in cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic conditions, and parenting roles. The inclusion criteria required participants to be parents of at least one child under the age of 12 and to have resided in Canada for a minimum of five years to ensure cultural adaptation alongside preservation of ethnic identity.

A total of 23 participants (13 mothers and 10 fathers) were included in the study. They represented diverse cultural groups including South Asian, East Asian, Middle Eastern, European, and Indigenous backgrounds. Recruitment was facilitated through community centers, multicultural associations, and parent groups across Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal. The final sample size was determined by theoretical saturation, achieved when no new themes or insights emerged from the data despite additional interviews.

### 2.2 Measure

#### 2.2.1 Semi-Structured Interview

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, each lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via secure online platforms, depending on participant preference and geographical accessibility. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions that explored key domains such as cultural beliefs about parenting, emotional expression within families, intergenerational differences in attachment practices, and perceived influences of Canadian multicultural contexts on parent–child bonding.

Examples of guiding questions included:

- “How do you express love and care toward your child in everyday interactions?”
- “What cultural or family traditions influence how you connect emotionally with your child?”
- “How has living in Canada affected your relationship and emotional closeness with your child?”

All interviews were conducted in English, though translation assistance was provided when necessary. With participants' consent, each session was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Confidentiality was strictly maintained through pseudonyms and removal of identifiable details.

### 2.3 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed thematically using NVivo 14 qualitative analysis software to facilitate systematic coding and theme development. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis framework, encompassing familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, identification of potential themes, reviewing and refining themes, defining and naming themes, and finally producing a coherent narrative of findings.

First, the transcripts were read multiple times to gain an overall understanding of the participants' perspectives. Then, open coding was applied line by line to identify meaningful statements reflecting experiences, beliefs, or cultural meanings related to attachment. Codes were grouped into categories that captured broader patterns of cultural influence, emotional socialization, and parenting values. Through constant comparison, these categories evolved into higher-order themes representing cultural pathways of attachment development.

To ensure trustworthiness, several strategies were applied:

- Credibility was strengthened through member checking, where a subset of participants reviewed preliminary interpretations for accuracy.
- Dependability was ensured by maintaining a detailed audit trail of coding decisions and analytic memos within NVivo.
- Transferability was supported by providing rich, contextual descriptions of participants and their cultural contexts.
- Confirmability was achieved through peer debriefing with two qualitative research experts who reviewed coding consistency and thematic coherence.

Overall, the integration of systematic thematic analysis and the use of NVivo 14 facilitated a transparent and rigorous exploration of the cultural mechanisms shaping parent–child attachment development among Canadian families.

### 3 Findings and Results

The study sample comprised 23 participants (13 mothers and 10 fathers) representing a diverse range of cultural and

socioeconomic backgrounds across Canada. Participants' ages ranged from 29 to 52 years ( $M = 38.6$ ), with the majority ( $n = 15$ ; 65%) belonging to the 30–40 age group, reflecting the typical parenting stage of early to middle adulthood. In terms of cultural background, 6 participants (26%) identified as South Asian, 5 (22%) as East Asian, 4 (17%) as Middle Eastern, 4 (17%) as European-Canadian, and 4 (17%) as Indigenous or mixed cultural heritage. The majority of participants ( $n = 14$ ; 61%) had completed university or postgraduate education, while 9 participants (39%) reported having high school or college-level education.

Regarding employment status, 11 participants (48%) were employed full-time, 6 (26%) part-time, and 6 (26%) identified as full-time caregivers or homemakers. Most families reported middle-income levels ( $n = 12$ ; 52%), while 7 (30%) reported lower-income status and 4 (18%) reported higher-income levels. The length of residence in Canada ranged from 5 to 22 years ( $M = 11.8$ ), indicating varied levels of cultural adaptation and integration. The number of children per family ranged from 1 to 4, with an average of 2.1 children. Overall, the demographic profile reflected a heterogeneous sample that captured a broad spectrum of cultural, socioeconomic, and parenting experiences within the Canadian context.

**Table 1**

*Themes, Subthemes, and Concepts Derived from Qualitative Analysis*

Main Themes (Categories)	Subthemes	Concepts (Open Codes)
1. Cultural Interpretations of Emotional Bonding	Parental Expression of Affection	Physical closeness (hugs, touch), verbal reassurance, gift-giving, shared rituals, quality time, storytelling traditions
	Emotion Regulation and Cultural Norms	Encouraging emotional restraint, valuing calmness, discouraging anger display, modeling empathy, teaching patience
	Transmission of Cultural Values	Family hierarchy respect, collectivist duty, religious or spiritual narratives, moral lessons through stories
	Intergenerational Continuity and Change	Conflict between traditional and modern values, adaptation to Canadian norms, grandparents' influence, selective cultural retention
	Bicultural Parenting Practices	Combining home culture with Canadian norms, flexibility in parenting rules, balancing emotional warmth and discipline
2. Migration and Cultural Adaptation in Parenting	Symbolic Acts of Care	Cooking favorite meals, participating in cultural festivals, creating shared spaces, storytelling as bonding
	Acculturation and Identity Negotiation	Balancing heritage and host culture, cultural pride, negotiation of gender roles, parenting under cultural ambiguity
	Influence of Canadian Multicultural Context	Exposure to diverse parenting models, tolerance and empathy development, social comparison among communities
	Parenting Challenges in Migration	Language barriers, isolation from extended family, economic stress, adapting disciplinary strategies
	Role of Community Networks	Support from cultural centers, participation in ethnic associations, emotional reliance on peer parents, religious communities as anchors
3. Pathways of Attachment Formation	Shifting Family Dynamics	Dual-working parents, shared domestic roles, evolving power balance, role reversal in language mediation by children
	Emotional Communication Patterns	Listening without judgment, validating feelings, physical affection, open dialogue, emotional coaching
	Trust and Security Development	Consistent caregiving, emotional availability, reliability, protection during stress, encouragement of independence



Cultural Models of Attachment	Hierarchical vs. egalitarian bonds, dependency as care vs. weakness, attachment expectations by gender
Parenting Goals and Attachment Outcomes	Raising confident children, promoting moral responsibility, fostering emotional resilience, autonomy encouragement
Role of Extended Family	Supportive caregiving, shared parenting roles, intergenerational modeling, emotional mentoring by elders
Impact of Socioeconomic Context	Work-life balance challenges, limited time with children, emotional compensation through gifts or leisure, stress affecting bonding
Parental Reflection and Growth	Learning from children's emotions, self-awareness in parenting, re-evaluating attachment styles, emotional literacy improvement

### Theme 1: Cultural Interpretations of Emotional Bonding

The first major theme highlighted how cultural values deeply shaped parents' emotional expressions and bonding practices with their children. Participants described affection not only as a matter of emotion but also as a reflection of cultural norms and moral teachings. For many, love was expressed through *actions* rather than words—preparing favorite meals, storytelling, or participating in shared family rituals. As one Iranian mother noted, *"In my culture, we show love through care—cooking, protecting, teaching—not necessarily by saying 'I love you' every day."* Similarly, participants from East Asian backgrounds emphasized calmness and emotional restraint, associating excessive emotional display with a lack of discipline. This notion was reflected in one father's statement: *"My parents always told me not to overreact emotionally; they said love is in your actions, not your tears."*

Cultural transmission emerged as a crucial subtheme, where parents consciously embedded traditional values—respect for elders, moral responsibility, and community orientation—into their attachment practices. However, many also acknowledged generational shifts. One South Asian participant remarked, *"My kids are growing up Canadian; I can't parent them exactly how my parents did back home."* Parents described blending cultural traditions with Canadian norms to achieve bicultural balance, demonstrating flexibility in emotional expression and discipline. Symbolic acts of care, such as involving children in cultural festivals and family storytelling, were described as powerful means of nurturing emotional connection and identity continuity.

### Theme 2: Migration and Cultural Adaptation in Parenting

The second theme captured how migration and adaptation to Canadian society redefined parenting roles and emotional dynamics within families. Participants explained that acculturation often required balancing traditional heritage with the realities of a new cultural environment. This dual identity sometimes caused internal tension, as one Middle Eastern father explained: *"At home, I want to keep our*

*traditions alive, but outside, I want my kids to fit in; it's a daily negotiation."* Parents reflected on learning new models of parenting from Canadian peers—particularly the emphasis on open emotional communication and egalitarian family relationships. One mother from China observed, *"In Canada, parents talk more to children about feelings. It made me realize listening is also a form of love."*

The multicultural environment also expanded parents' understanding of empathy and tolerance, as exposure to diverse family structures encouraged more inclusive attitudes. However, participants described challenges linked to migration stressors such as language barriers, financial strain, and limited support from extended family. A South Asian mother shared, *"Back home, my mother and sisters helped with the kids, but here, I'm alone. Sometimes it feels emotionally exhausting."* To cope, many parents turned to community centers, religious institutions, or ethnic networks for both emotional and practical support. Shifting family dynamics also emerged, as dual-working parents negotiated shared responsibilities. Some noted that children became cultural and linguistic mediators, translating not only language but also emotional codes. One participant reflected, *"My daughter helps me understand the Canadian way of talking about feelings; she's like my emotional teacher."*

### Theme 3: Pathways of Attachment Formation

The third theme focused on the mechanisms through which attachment was built and sustained within the cultural context. Across interviews, emotional communication, trust, and consistency were described as foundational to strong attachment. Parents emphasized the importance of listening, validating feelings, and maintaining availability during stress. As one Indigenous father stated, *"When my son cries, I don't tell him to stop; I ask what hurts his heart. That's how trust grows."* Participants repeatedly highlighted that attachment was not only emotional but moral—a process that intertwined caregiving, guidance, and shared growth.

Cultural models of attachment varied: in collectivist families, closeness and interdependence were valued, while in Western-oriented families, autonomy and self-expression

were seen as markers of secure attachment. A European mother explained, “*I want my child to be independent, but also to know he can always come back home emotionally.*” Parents’ goals often included raising children who were both emotionally strong and culturally grounded. Extended families, when accessible, played a vital role in modeling emotional connection and supporting caregiving responsibilities. For instance, one participant shared, “*My mother’s presence brings calm; she teaches my kids what love looks like in silence.*” Socioeconomic pressures occasionally interfered with bonding, with some parents compensating for limited time through material gestures. Yet many reflected on personal growth through parenting, as one father summarized: “*My children have taught me more about emotions than any book or tradition could.*”

Overall, these findings illustrate that parent–child attachment development among Canadian families is profoundly influenced by cultural meaning systems, migration experiences, and emotional learning processes. The interplay of traditional values and new social environments generates diverse yet coherent pathways of attachment, integrating both emotional warmth and cultural continuity.

#### 4 Discussion and Conclusion

The present study explored the cultural pathways shaping parent–child attachment development among multicultural families living in Canada. The findings revealed three overarching themes: *Cultural Interpretations of Emotional Bonding*, *Migration and Cultural Adaptation in Parenting*, and *Pathways of Attachment Formation*. Together, these themes highlighted that attachment processes are not static or universal but culturally situated, shaped by emotional norms, migration experiences, and intergenerational belief systems. This section discusses the implications of these findings in relation to previous studies and theoretical frameworks on cross-cultural attachment and emotional development.

The first theme, *Cultural Interpretations of Emotional Bonding*, demonstrated that emotional connection and affection between parents and children are expressed in culturally distinct ways. Participants described that love and care were often communicated through actions—providing food, engaging in shared rituals, or fulfilling family responsibilities—rather than through explicit verbal expressions. This finding aligns with previous studies emphasizing that in collectivist and interdependent societies,

attachment is expressed through *doing* rather than *saying* (Bakaraki et al., 2024; Williams et al., 2024). For instance, in Chinese and Japanese families, emotional restraint and indirect expressions of care are normative and are understood by children as signs of deep parental concern (Hoenicka et al., 2022; Inagawa & Nakao, 2023). Similarly, Mediterranean and South Asian families often use symbolic gestures, such as food preparation and storytelling, to convey affection (Rodríguez-González et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2020).

This culturally grounded form of affection challenges Western conceptions of attachment, which tend to equate emotional openness with secure attachment (Wang et al., 2022; Zayas & Sakman, 2020). Participants’ accounts suggest that emotional security can arise from a sense of predictability, moral duty, and family cohesion rather than overt emotional expression. In line with this, studies have shown that in collectivist contexts, secure attachment may be more strongly associated with fulfilling role expectations and demonstrating loyalty than with verbal intimacy (Ailauova, 2021; Kafetsios, 2021). This pattern reflects the broader concept of *cultural attunement*, where parental sensitivity is defined by responsiveness to cultural scripts rather than universal behavioral standards (Sakman & Sümer, 2024).

The second major theme, *Migration and Cultural Adaptation in Parenting*, revealed that parents navigating multicultural environments actively construct hybrid attachment models that merge their cultural heritage with new social expectations. This bicultural process of adaptation involved integrating traditional collectivist principles—such as obedience, respect, and family duty—with Canadian norms of independence, open communication, and emotional validation. Such hybridization supports the notion of *bicultural competence* proposed in cross-cultural attachment research (Maftuhah et al., 2024; Patel et al., 2023). Previous studies have shown that immigrant families often reinterpret attachment behaviors to align with the host culture’s emotional norms without completely abandoning their own cultural traditions (Hollan & Nutsu, 2023; Williams et al., 2024).

For example, East Asian and South Asian immigrant parents may continue valuing filial piety and deference while also encouraging their children to express feelings and opinions more freely (Wang et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2020). The resulting attachment system is adaptive and fluid, allowing children to feel secure both within their family of origin and within the broader cultural context. Similar

observations were made in cross-national studies comparing attachment behaviors between Turkey and the United States, where exposure to individualistic environments gradually shifted parental emphasis toward emotional autonomy while retaining collectivist relational values (Sakman & Sümer, 2024). The Canadian context, characterized by cultural diversity and tolerance, seems to facilitate such dual identification, enabling parents to reframe traditional care practices in emotionally expressive terms.

Migration also introduced challenges related to the absence of extended family networks and the emotional toll of acculturation. Participants often described loneliness and a sense of disconnection from traditional support systems, leading them to seek alternative networks through community associations and peer groups. This is consistent with findings from multicultural parenting research, which suggest that communal networks function as surrogate attachment systems for immigrant families (Dybach, 2024; Li, 2022). The findings also align with observations in Russian and Eastern European contexts where social change and instability have required families to restructure caregiving models and redefine attachment hierarchies (Gerlach et al., 2022; Muhamedrahimov, 2022). The resilience of these families highlights the plasticity of attachment mechanisms when confronted with cultural and environmental transitions.

The third theme, *Pathways of Attachment Formation*, encompassed the emotional, relational, and cultural mechanisms through which attachment was nurtured and maintained. Emotional communication emerged as a key process—parents reported learning to balance emotional expression with restraint, depending on cultural norms and situational contexts. This dynamic interaction supports the ecological perspective of attachment, which posits that parental responsiveness is embedded in cultural systems of meaning (Bakaraki et al., 2024; Seldikov & Salykova, 2022). For instance, Indigenous participants emphasized that emotional security was fostered through collective caregiving, storytelling, and connection to the land and ancestors, reflecting the holistic worldview typical of First Nations communities (Neckoway et al., 2020). Such models expand attachment theory by incorporating spirituality and community as integral dimensions of secure bonding.

Trust and consistency were identified as universal components of attachment formation across cultural groups. However, the *expressive form* of these elements varied. In collectivist families, consistency was symbolized by parents' constant physical presence and protective behavior,

while in individualist families, it was represented through emotional availability and verbal affirmation. These findings correspond with cross-cultural studies demonstrating that secure attachment manifests differently across societies, depending on cultural expectations surrounding autonomy and dependence (Rodríguez-González et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the influence of socioeconomic factors on attachment formation emerged as a relevant dimension. Parents with demanding work schedules or financial stress reported compensating for limited time with material or symbolic acts of care, such as family outings or gift-giving. This compensatory behavior echoes previous evidence that attachment is shaped not only by emotional availability but also by structural constraints and contextual stressors (Gerlach et al., 2022; Tan et al., 2021). The interplay between economic and cultural pressures underlines the multidimensional nature of attachment, integrating both psychological and sociocultural determinants.

Collectively, the findings reinforce the view that attachment development cannot be understood outside its cultural ecology. Cross-cultural studies have long demonstrated that parental sensitivity, emotional expressiveness, and autonomy granting are interpreted differently across cultural environments (Hollan & Nutsunidze, 2023; Seldikov & Salykova, 2022). This study extends that understanding by illustrating how parents actively negotiate these meanings within the Canadian multicultural context. Participants' experiences support the notion that secure attachment is achievable through multiple cultural routes—whether through emotional openness, moral responsibility, or collective support systems. This pluralistic understanding corresponds with the argument that attachment should be seen as a flexible relational system that reflects both biological needs and cultural scripts (Ailauova, 2021; Zayas & Sakman, 2020).

In addition, the intergenerational dimension of attachment was evident in parents' efforts to pass down cultural values while adapting to new societal norms. This balance between continuity and change resonates with research in Japanese and Mediterranean contexts, where attachment representations are shaped by historical caregiving traditions and evolving social values (Hoenicka et al., 2022; Inagawa & Nakao, 2023). The process of transmitting cultural scripts about affection, respect, and responsibility underscores attachment as both an emotional and moral construct (Maftuhah et al., 2024).



The present findings also reveal that parents' self-reflection and emotional awareness play a central role in maintaining attachment quality during migration. Many participants described learning emotional vocabulary from their children, demonstrating how intergenerational dialogue fosters mutual growth. This aligns with recent studies highlighting the bidirectional nature of attachment formation—where children influence parental emotional development as much as the reverse (Chen et al., 2025; Huang, 2025). The recognition of children as active participants rather than passive recipients in attachment processes marks a significant shift in contemporary attachment theory.

From a theoretical perspective, these results support calls for the *decolonization* and *contextualization* of attachment theory (Bakaraki et al., 2024; Patel et al., 2023). By moving beyond Western-centric assumptions, attachment research can better account for diverse caregiving practices and relational ethics worldwide. Moreover, these findings reaffirm that emotional security is culturally constructed through relational patterns that fulfill both psychological and sociocultural needs (Kafetsios, 2021; Wang et al., 2022). In this regard, multicultural environments such as Canada serve as natural laboratories for understanding how cultural negotiation shapes the emotional architecture of families.

Finally, the convergence between attachment, cross-cultural competence, and emotional regulation suggests an integrative framework for understanding parenting in globalized societies. Developing cultural sensitivity and flexibility in emotional expression allows families to preserve relational continuity while adapting to new social realities (Dybach, 2024; Seldikov & Salykova, 2022). These findings extend previous theoretical models by emphasizing attachment as an adaptive cultural process—a living system of emotional communication that evolves alongside changing identities and environments.

Despite its rich qualitative insights, this study has several limitations. The sample size, while sufficient for thematic saturation, was limited to 23 participants, which restricts generalizability across all cultural groups in Canada. The reliance on self-reported interviews may also have introduced social desirability bias, as participants could have presented culturally idealized versions of their parenting experiences. Moreover, the diversity of cultural backgrounds, though valuable, limited the depth of analysis within specific cultural subgroups. The study also focused solely on parents' perspectives, excluding children's views, which might have provided a more reciprocal understanding

of attachment. Finally, the study's cross-sectional design captures experiences at one point in time, leaving longitudinal aspects of cultural adaptation unexplored.

Future studies should employ mixed-methods or longitudinal designs to examine how cultural attachment pathways evolve over time and across generations. Including both parents and children as participants would enrich the understanding of reciprocal attachment formation. Comparative research between first- and second-generation immigrant families could also clarify how acculturation influences emotional expression and attachment security. Additionally, exploring underrepresented cultural groups and Indigenous parenting traditions could broaden the global inclusivity of attachment theory. Finally, integrating psychophysiological or behavioral measures of attachment alongside qualitative narratives may deepen understanding of how cultural and emotional processes interact in real-time family dynamics.

Practitioners working with multicultural families—such as educators, counselors, and social workers—should adopt culturally sensitive approaches that recognize diverse expressions of attachment and affection. Training programs should emphasize that emotional warmth may manifest through culturally specific behaviors, and interventions should respect these variations rather than pathologize them. Family support services can promote bicultural competence by helping immigrant parents balance heritage values with host-country expectations. Policymakers should also ensure that mental health and family counseling frameworks are inclusive of multicultural norms, encouraging integration without assimilation. By acknowledging multiple cultural pathways to attachment, professionals can better support the emotional resilience and relational harmony of diverse families in Canada.

### Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

### Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

### Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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### Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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### Ethics Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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