



## Original Article

# Role of adult attachment and spiritual attachment on meaning in life among religious minorities in Thailand: Insights for mental health promotion

Suriwong Wongratanamajcha<sup>1</sup>, Justin DeMaranville<sup>1</sup>, Tinakon Wongpakaran<sup>1,2\*</sup>, Unchalee Permsuwan<sup>1,3</sup> and Shirley Worland<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Mental Health Program, Multidisciplinary and Interdisciplinary School (MIDS), Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai, Thailand; <sup>2</sup>Department of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medicine, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai, Thailand; <sup>3</sup>Department of Pharmaceutical Care, Faculty of Pharmacy, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai, Thailand; <sup>4</sup>Faculty of Health Sciences, University of New England, Armidale, Australia

\*Corresponding author: [tinakon.w@cmu.ac.th](mailto:tinakon.w@cmu.ac.th)

## Abstract

Attachment theory suggests that secure relationships are foundational to meaning in life, but less is known about the role of spiritual attachment, especially among religious minorities. This study examined whether attachment to God mediates the relationship between insecure human attachment and the presence of meaning in life among Thai Protestant Christians. A cross-sectional survey was conducted with Thai Protestant Christians, assessing insecure human attachment (avoidant and anxious), attachment to God, and the presence of meaning in life using validated self-report measures. Mediation analysis was used to test the indirect effect of insecure attachment on meaning via attachment to God. The results showed that attachment to God fully mediated the negative relationship between insecure human attachment and the presence of meaning in life. Participants with higher insecure attachment reported lower meaning in life, but those with a secure attachment to God did not display this deficit. Attachment to God serves as a central psychological resource, a positive figure for humans, and enhances meaning in life, particularly in the minority context of Thai Protestant Christians. These findings highlight the importance of spiritual interventions for individuals experiencing relational or social marginalization.

**Keywords:** Attachment to God, meaning in life, insecure attachment, Thai Protestant Christians, religious minority

## Introduction

The presence of meaning in life is widely recognized as a cornerstone of psychological well-being and existential fulfillment. Meaning in life, at its core, refers to the perception that one's existence is coherent, purposeful, and significant [1]. Scholars have long emphasized that this sense of meaning is not only a philosophical question but a critical psychological resource influencing how individuals interpret their experiences, set goals, and respond to adversity. An empirical study demonstrates that individuals who report a high presence of meaning in their lives show greater life satisfaction, better coping with stress, and lower levels of depression and anxiety [2]. Conversely, deficits in perceived meaning are strongly associated with psychological distress, hopelessness, and even suicidality [2]. Therefore, identifying the factors that lay the foundation for the presence of meaning is essential for advancing both theory and the promotion of mental health.



Human relationships figure prominently among these foundational factors. From infancy, the quality of caregiving and the emotional bonds formed with attachment figures play an essential role in psychological development. Attachment theory, as articulated by John Bowlby [3] and Mary Ainsworth [4], posits that early interactions with caregivers shape internal working models; core beliefs and expectations about oneself, others, and the nature of relationships. Individuals who have experienced consistent, responsive, and nurturing care typically develop a secure attachment, characterized by trust, a healthy sense of autonomy, and confidence in others' reliability. This security not only underpins resilience and self-esteem, but also facilitates the development of a stable and enduring sense of life's meaning [5].

Conversely, when caregiving is inconsistent, rejecting, or emotionally unavailable, children are more likely to develop insecure attachment styles. Insecure attachment can be described in terms of anxious and avoidant attachment. Anxious attachment is associated with heightened fears of rejection, an excessive need for approval, and preoccupation with others' availability. Avoidant attachment, on the other hand, is marked by discomfort with closeness and dependence, a preference for self-sufficiency, and reluctance to trust or open up emotionally [5]. Both forms of insecure attachment have been linked in adulthood to greater psychological vulnerability, difficulties in forming stable relationships, and importantly, a reduced presence of meaning in life. Individuals who lack secure attachment may struggle to see their lives as coherent, valuable, and as having a reliable sense of purpose.

While much of the literature has focused on attachment in the context of interpersonal relationships, related research has turned toward the potential of spiritual relationships to compensate for or correspond with attachment dynamics. Particularly within the psychology of religion, the concept of "attachment to God" has gained prominence. Pioneering work in this area, Granqvist and Kirkpatrick [6] contend that for many believers, God functions not only as a transcendent figure but also as an emotionally meaningful attachment figure. Additionally, theological traditions that characterize God as personal, loving, and omnipresent may facilitate such spiritual bonds. Attachment with God may mirror or even substitute for human attachments—especially when earthly relationships are unsatisfying or unreliable [7].

Attachment to God is typically conceptualized along dimensions analogous to those in human relationships. Secure attachment to God involves seeing the divine as available, responsive, and accepting, while anxious or avoidant attachment to God reflects fears of abandonment or discomfort with intimacy [8]. A study indicates that secure attachment to God is associated with emotional regulation, psychological resilience, and crucially, a greater presence of meaning in life [9]. Those with insecure spiritual attachment may instead experience spiritual struggles, doubt, or a diminished sense of existential significance.

This mediating role of attachment to God is especially salient in cultural contexts where access to supportive human relationships may be limited, such as in religious minority populations. In Thailand, Christians represent a small minority, comprising approximately 1.2% of the population, with Protestants accounting for 0.75% [10,11]. For Thai Protestants, the minority religion experience may bring increased challenges, including social marginalization, feelings of isolation, and reduced access to broader community supports [12]. In such settings, attachment to God may play a particularly prominent role in sustaining psychological well-being and a sense of meaning, serving as a refuge or source of unconditional acceptance when other relational supports are strained or unavailable.

Despite its potential importance, there is a paucity of research exploring these relational processes among non-Western, minority Christian populations. The present study seeks to address this gap by examining the relationships among insecure attachment, attachment to God, and the presence of meaning in life among Protestant Christians in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Specifically, the study investigates whether attachment to God mediates the effect of insecure human attachment (anxious and avoidant) on the presence of meaning. This study hypothesized that higher levels of insecure attachment would be associated with a lower presence of meaning in life. In contrast, more secure attachment to God may buffer or attenuate this negative relationship, facilitating a stronger sense of coherence, purpose, and significance.

## Methods

### Study design, sample criteria and sample size calculation

This was a cross-sectional study focusing on primary data collection of Thai Protestant Christians in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The inclusion criteria include those who are Thai citizens, can read and write Thai, are over 20 years of age, are members of a government-registered Protestant church in Chiang Mai, have served (volunteered) in the church in the past six months, and are willing to participate in the study. These criteria were established to keep the sample as homogeneous as possible. Exclusion criteria included participants of churches where Thai was not the primary language, blind or deaf participants, foreign-born Thais, and those with dual citizenship.

The sample size for this study was determined via a post hoc power analysis for parallel mediation using the coefficient  $r$ . The sample in this study comprised 202 participants, resulting in a power of 0.98 for the  $a^2-b^2$  mediation pathway (AGI-Anxiety) and a power of 0.76 for the  $a^1-b^1$  mediation pathway (AGI-Avoidance), indicating slight underpowering in the avoidant pathway. This increased chance of type-II error indicates an actual effect may be missed, and non-significant results should be interpreted with caution. Anxious attachment had adequate power, while attachment avoidance at this sample size was slightly underpowered. Numerous studies reported non-significant or minor mediation effects for avoidant attachment. For instance, another similar study in Thailand, DeMaranville *et al.* [13] showed a significantly weaker avoidant attachment indirect effect relative to anxious attachment. These patterns, found in many studies [14-16], consistently suggested that avoidant attachment mediation effects are often subtle and may evade detection in typical sample sizes, indicating common underpowering in this research area.

### Sampling method and data collection

A convenient sampling method was employed to collect data from Christian Protestants via pen-and-paper surveys or online questionnaires. Starting from larger churches in Chiang Mai city and expanding to different churches throughout Chiang Mai province. All participants gave written informed consent and completed the questionnaire at their own pace. The data collection period was from January to May 2025. Demographic questions about participant age, sex, household income, educational level, and how long they had been a Christian, as well as instruments assessing insecure attachment styles, attachment to God, and meaning in life, were provided to participants.

### Study instruments

#### *Experiences in close relationships revised (ECR-R)*

To measure anxious and avoidant adult attachment dimensions, the experiences in close relationships-revised (ECR-R) tool was used. This questionnaire was revised from the ECR-r 36 questionnaire [17]. The tool uses a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 4=neutral/mix, 7=strongly agree). The median score is 4, with one considered secure and seven highly insecure in each dimension. A test-retest correlation showed a score of anxiety -0.93 and avoidance -0.95, followed by anxiety -0.94 and avoidance -0.95. Wongpakaran *et al.* [18] developed a shortened Thai translation version with 10 questions, five for anxiety and five for avoidance. In both clinical/nonclinical settings, Cronbach's alpha was in the range of 0.81–0.85 for avoidance and 0.81–0.86 for anxiety. For this study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.873 for anxious attachment and 0.860 for avoidant attachment.

#### *Attachment to God inventory (AGI)*

To measure anxious and avoidant insecure spiritual attachment dimensions, the attachment to God inventory (AGI), developed by Beck and McDonald, was used [8]. The AGI was adapted from the ECR scale, developed by Brennan *et al.* [19]. The AGI assesses two dimensions: avoidance (reluctance to depend on God and emotional distance) and anxiety (fear of abandonment by God and concern about worthiness of God's love). The inventory contains 28 items—14 for anxiety and 14 for avoidance—rated on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). There are no cutoff scores.

Beck and McDonald reported strong internal consistency, with alpha coefficients for avoidance ranging from 0.84 to 0.86 and for anxiety from 0.80 to 0.87 [8]. In the present study, the Thai version of the AGI was used, with items 13, 21, and 25 (anxious attachment), and 6, 14, 18, and 26 (avoidance) removed to improve reliability. Cronbach's alpha was 0.896 for anxious attachment and 0.776 for avoidance in this sample.

### *Meaning in life questionnaire (MLQ)-presence subscale*

To measure the presence of meaning in life, the meaning in life questionnaire (MLQ) was employed in this study [20]. This tool includes two subscales: the presence of meaning in life and the search for meaning in life, each with 5 items. This instrument's 10 items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("Absolutely Untrue") to 7 ("Absolutely True"), with four indicating "cannot say true or false." For this study, only the Presence subscale (MLQ-P) was used, which assesses explicitly the degree to which respondents feel their lives are meaningful and have purpose. Previous research has demonstrated strong psychometric properties for the MLQ-P. Steger *et al.* [20] reported alpha coefficients of 0.81 and 0.86 in two studies, indicating good internal consistency; the one-month test-retest reliability was also satisfactory at 0.70. In this study, the MLQ-P showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.795, further supporting its reliability in the present sample. Although MLQ does not have a specific cutoff score, higher MLQ-P scores suggest that an individual perceives their life as having substantial meaning and purpose.

### **Statistical analysis**

All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS version 27 (IBM Corp., New York, USA). Before the main analyses, data were screened for completeness, outliers, and violations of statistical assumptions. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and ranges, were calculated for all study variables: insecure attachment (anxious and avoidant), attachment to God (anxious and avoidant), and the presence of meaning in life. The internal consistency of each scale was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Normality of distributions was assessed via skewness, kurtosis, and the Shapiro-Wilk test. In addition, scatterplots and Q-Q plots were visually inspected. Pearson's correlation coefficients computed the associations between insecure attachment (anxious, avoidant), attachment to God (anxious, avoidant), and the presence of meaning in life.

To test the hypothesized mediation model—whether attachment to God mediates the relationship between insecure attachment and the presence of meaning in life, Hayes' PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 4) was applied [21]. Separate mediation analyses were conducted for the anxious and avoidant dimensions of insecure attachment. Bootstrapping with 5,000 samples was used to generate 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals for indirect effects. Mediation was considered significant if confidence intervals did not include zero. All tests were two-tailed, with a significance level set at  $p < 0.05$ . Where relevant, demographic variables such as age and gender were controlled for in additional analysis. Results are reported as unstandardized coefficients (B), standard errors (SE), and 95% confidence intervals for direct and indirect effects.

## **Results**

### **Participants' characteristics**

A total of 202 Protestant Christians who resided in Chiang Mai, Thailand, participated in the study, and their sociodemographic characteristics are presented in **Table 1**. The mean age of the participants was 44.05 years, and 127 (62.9%) were females.

Almost half of the participants (47.5%) reported a monthly household income of 20,000-25,000 Thai Baht (THB) (**Table 1**). The majority had attained at least a bachelor's degree (53.5%), while 26.7% had education beyond the bachelor's level. A total of 122 participants (60.40%) reported having been a Christian for over 20 years, while the remaining 80 (39.60%) have been a Christian for less than 20 years (**Table 1**).

### **Descriptive analysis of measurements' scores**

Descriptive statistics for all continuous variables are presented in **Table 2**. Insecure attachment scores indicated moderate levels of anxious attachment (score  $2.32 \pm 1.32$ ) and avoidant

attachment (score  $3.08 \pm 1.50$ ). Anxious attachment to God scores totaled 26.01 (SD=13.31), with avoidance scores totaling 21.24 (SD=9.10). For the meaning in life presence outcome, participants had a mean score of 27.83.

### **Correlations between attachment dimensions, attachment to God, and meaning in life**

Correlations among sociodemographic variables, attachment dimensions, attachment to God, and meaning in life are presented in **Table 3**. Several significant patterns emerged, with the strongest correlation observed between attachment insecurity (both human and with God) and meaning in life.

Among sociodemographic factors, age showed a positive correlation with the presence of meaning ( $r=0.218$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Household income and education level were both positively correlated with the presence of meaning ( $r=0.239$  and  $r=0.202$ , respectively, both  $p<0.01$ ) and negatively correlated with both AGI anxious and avoidant attachment.

The strongest correlations were observed among the attachment variables. ECR-R anxious attachment showed a moderate positive correlation with AGI anxious attachment ( $r=0.483$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and AGI avoidant attachment ( $r=0.412$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), and a moderate negative correlation with the presence of meaning ( $r=-0.353$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). ECR-R avoidant attachment was positively correlated to AGI avoidant attachment ( $r=0.282$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and AGI anxious attachment ( $r=0.186$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). In contrast, it was negatively correlated with the presence of meaning ( $r=-0.176$ ,  $p<0.05$ ).

Both AGI avoidant attachment ( $r=-0.421$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and AGI anxious attachment ( $r=-0.478$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) were moderately, negatively correlated with the presence of meaning in life. These findings indicated that higher levels of insecure attachment (both human and with God) were associated with a lower presence of meaning in life.

### **Mediation analysis**

The mediation analysis was conducted to examine whether anxious and avoidant attachment to God mediated the relationships between insecure adult attachment (ECR-R anxious attachment and avoidant attachment) and the presence of meaning in life. The results of the mediation analysis are presented in **Table 4**.

#### *Total effects*

The total effect of ECR-R avoidant attachment on the presence of meaning was significant ( $\beta=-0.162$ ,  $SE=0.238$ ,  $p=0.015$ , 95%CI: -1.493 to -0.384), indicating that greater insecure attachment was associated with lower presence of meaning. The model explained 22% of the variance in the presence of meaning ( $R^2=0.22$ ).

#### *Direct effects (controlling for mediators)*

When controlling for the mediators, the direct effects of both ECR-R avoidant attachment ( $\beta=-0.084$ ,  $p=0.187$ ) and ECR-R anxious attachment ( $\beta=-0.057$ ,  $p=0.431$ ) on the presence of meaning were no longer significant. This loss of significance reflected complete mediation by attachment-to-God variables. The overall model explained 33% of the variance in the presence of meaning ( $R^2=0.33$ ).

#### *Indirect effects*

The total indirect effect of attachment to God on the adult insecure attachment and the presence of a meaningful relationship was significant ( $\beta=-0.174$ ,  $SE=0.046$ , 95%CI: -0.274 to -0.090). These results indicated that both AGI avoidant attachment and AGI anxious attachment significantly mediate the negative relationship between insecure adult attachment and the presence of meaning in life. AGI anxious attachment accounted for the larger proportion of the effect ( $\beta=-0.104$ , 95%CI: -0.191 to -0.021) compared with AGI avoidant attachment ( $\beta=-0.070$ , 95%CI: -0.144 to -0.012).

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants (n=202)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age (mean±SD, year)	44.05±13.92	
Sex		
Female	127	62.9
Male	75	37.1
Monthly household income (THB)		
0–4,999	12	5.9
5,000–9,999	14	6.9
10,000–14,999	43	21.3
15,000–19,999	37	18.3
20,000–25,000+	96	47.5
Education level		
Elementary	1	0.5
High school/vocational school certificate	27	13.4
Associates/higher vocational school diploma	12	5.9
Bachelor's degree	108	53.5
Higher than a bachelor's	54	26.7
Been a Christian for how long		
Less than 1 year	2	1.0
1–3 years	4	2.0
3–5 years	7	3.5
5–10 years	22	10.9
10–20 years	45	22.3
20–40 years	93	46.0
More than 40 years	29	14.4

\*1 USD=32 THB (exchange rate at time of study)

Table 2. Mean score of measurements (insecure attachment dimensions, attachment to God, and meaning in life)

Variables	Mean±SD	Skew	Kurtosis
Predictor (insecure attachment)			
ECR-R anxious attachment score	2.32±1.32	0.928	0.160
ECR-R avoidant attachment score	3.08±1.50	0.502	-0.453
Mediator (attachment to God)			
AGI anxious attachment score	26.01±13.31	1.073	0.710
AGI avoidant attachment score	21.24±9.10	0.914	0.360
Outcome (meaning in life)			
MLQ presence	27.83±5.39	-0.791	0.881

AGI: attachment to God inventory; ECR-R: experiences in close relationships-Revised; MLQ: meaning in life questionnaire

Table 3. Correlations among sociodemographic variables, attachment dimensions, attachment to God, and meaning in life

Variables	Age	Sex	Household income	Education level	Duration of faith	ECR-R avoidant attachment	ECR-R anxious attachment	AGI avoidant attachment	AGI anxious attachment	Meaning in life presence
Age	-	0.008	0.142*	0.018	0.415**	0.144*	-0.121	-0.087	-0.194**	0.218**
Sex		-	0.033	-0.039	-0.041	-0.053	0.129	-0.201**	0.067	-0.107
Household income			-	0.154*	0.206**	0.028	-0.195**	-0.297**	-0.205**	0.239**
Education level				-	0.230**	-0.062	-0.238**	-0.154*	-0.149*	0.202**
Duration of faith					-	0.105	-0.159*	-0.180*	-0.102	0.171*
ECR-R avoidant attachment						-	0.193**	0.282**	0.186**	-0.176*
ECR-R anxious attachment							-	0.412**	0.483**	-0.353**
AGI avoidant attachment								-	0.561**	-0.421**
AGI anxious attachment									-	-0.478**
Meaning in life presence										-

\*Statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$ \*\*Statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$ 

Table 4. Mediating effects of attachment to God between insecure attachment and the presence of meaning in life, controlling for age, sex, household income, education, and duration of faith.

Model pathways	Standardized coefficient ( $\beta$ )	Standard error (SE)	$p$ -value	Lower-level 95%CI	Upper-level 95%CI
Total effects (c) $R^2=0.22$					
ECR-R avoidant attachment → presence of meaning	-0.162	0.238	0.015	-1.051	-0.114
ECR-R anxious attachment → presence of meaning	-0.230	0.281	0.001	-1.493	-0.384
Direct effect (c') $R^2=0.33$					
ECR-R avoidant attachment → presence of meaning	-0.084	0.230	0.187	-0.756	0.149
ECR-R anxious attachment → presence of meaning	-0.057	0.292	0.431	-0.807	0.346
AGI avoidant attachment → presence of meaning (b <sup>1</sup> )	-0.206	0.048	0.012	-0.217	-0.027
AGI anxious attachment → presence of meaning (b <sup>2</sup> )	-0.251	0.032	0.002	-0.164	-0.039
Pathways a <sup>1</sup> -b <sup>1</sup>					
ECR-R avoidant attachment → AGI avoidant attachment (a <sup>1</sup> )	0.221	0.372	<0.001	0.609	2.075
ECR-R anxious attachment → AGI avoidant attachment (a <sup>1</sup> )	0.338	0.439	<0.001	1.463	3.196
ECR-R avoidant attachment → AGI anxious attachment (a <sup>2</sup> )	0.127	0.564	0.047	0.016	2.241
ECR-R anxious attachment → AGI anxious attachment (a <sup>2</sup> )	0.413	0.667	<0.001	2.848	5.479
Indirect Effect					
Total indirect effect	-0.174	0.046		-0.274	-0.090
AGI avoidant attachment	-0.070	0.033		-0.144	-0.012
AGI anxious attachment	-0.104	0.043		-0.191	-0.021

AGI: attachment to God inventory; CI: confidence interval

a<sup>1</sup>: pathway between the predictor and the first mediatora<sup>2</sup>: pathway between the predictor and the second mediatorb<sup>1</sup>: pathway between the first mediator and the outcomeb<sup>2</sup>: pathway between the second mediator and the outcome

## Discussion

The present study investigated the relationships among insecure attachment, attachment to God, and meaning in life among Protestant Christians in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The results revealed that both insecure attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety in adult relationships were significantly associated with a lower presence of meaning in life. However, when insecure attachment to God was included as a mediating factor, the direct effects of adult attachment on the presence of meaning were no longer significant. Instead, avoidant and anxious attachment in one's relationship with God emerged as negative predictors of meaning in life. These findings highlight the central mediating role of attachment to God in the association between insecure adult attachment and the presence of meaning in life.

These results are in conjunction with classic attachment theory [3,4], confirming that early relational patterns continue to influence existential outcomes well into adulthood. Insecure attachment, whether marked by avoidance of intimacy or anxiety about abandonment, can impede an individual's ability to achieve a stable and prosperous sense of meaning in life. This study further corroborates prior findings that the effects of insecure attachment extend beyond interpersonal spheres and are closely linked to spiritual relationships [6].

In line with recent advancements in the psychology of religion, this study provides robust evidence that insecure attachment to God serves as an essential mediating pathway to understanding meaning in Thai Christian's lives. Related research found that insecure attachment to caregivers was associated with greater avoidance and anxiety concerning God, mirroring patterns found in human relational contexts [8]. In turn, both forms of insecure attachment to God predicted lower levels of perceived meaning. This finding highlights the importance of relational security on the presence of meaning in life. Previous research has suggested that a secure spiritual attachment can foster emotional security, resilience, and life purpose, especially when other relational sources of support may be limited [9].

The full mediation observed in this study has important implications. It suggests that insecure attachment with God has a pervasive influence on Thai Christian's perception of meaning in life. These results are in line with the correspondence theory of attachment to God, suggesting that one's early attachment relationships continue to influence later attachment formations [6]. In this case, participants with insecure adult attachment did not appear to have compensation and increased security in their spiritual relationship with God. Rather, their attachment insecurity with God mimicked their adult attachment, extending from the interpersonal to their attachment with God. These results follow recent literature that found correspondence in secure and insecure attachment amongst patients with brain injury [22].

These findings are important for highlighting that Christians who have secure human attachment are likely to maintain this relationship with God, as is the case with those who have insecure attachment orientations. It may be that developing a secure attachment to God can buffer, or even counteract, the negative impact of insecure attachment histories on a person's sense of life meaning. Pastoral and psychological interventions that support individuals in cultivating a more secure attachment to God could therefore play an influential role in enhancing meaning and overall well-being among Thai Christians.

While human relationships are subject to imperfection and unpredictability, attachment to a divine figure may allow for the construction of an ideal attachment prototype perceived as omnipresent, consistent, and responsive [23]. This idealized spiritual attachment can foster a particularly robust and stable foundation for meaning-making. For Thai Protestant Christians, whose minority status may entail social marginalization, the significance of spiritual affirmation from God may be further amplified, offering a critical psychological anchor in the absence of widespread social support [24,25]. In such contexts, God may serve both as a spiritual guide and as the psychological "secure base" and "haven" described in attachment theory, providing resilience and existential meaning [26].

Beyond practical implications, the current findings also contribute to cross-cultural and contextual understandings of attachment and meaning-making. Much of the existing literature on attachment to God has focused on Western populations. Demonstrating similar processes among Thai Protestants not only broadens the applicability of these models but also emphasizes the adaptive and cross-cultural relevance of spiritual attachment in meaning-making. The results



highlight the importance of considering both cultural context and minority status when studying existential well-being.

A notable strength of this study is its focus on an understudied cultural and religious minority—Thai Protestant Christians—providing valuable insight into how attachment processes operate outside Western, majority contexts. By incorporating both human and spiritual attachment variables, the study offers a comprehensive view of how different sources of relational security or insecurity influence the presence of meaning in life. The use of established, psychometrically robust measures for attachment and meaning enhances the validity and reliability of the findings. Additionally, the mediation analysis enriches our understanding of the mechanisms by which attachment to God can affect existential outcomes, thereby supporting nuanced theoretical development. Finally, the relatively high levels of education and long-term faith commitment of participants allow for a focused examination of how mature faith moderates these psychological processes.

This research, although robust, also has limitations. First, the cross-sectional nature of this study prevents causal inferences. Also, there is a self-selection bias that limits the study to active service members of the church. Second, self-reports may suggest response biases, particularly in the spiritual domain. Third, while this sample represents an important and understudied group, generalizability to other branches of Christianity or cultural backgrounds remains uncertain. Further research is needed in diverse religious and cultural contexts to explore the boundary conditions of these findings. Future research could also examine the role of specific Christian practices in strengthening attachment to God. It is suggested that a longitudinal study in the population or even expanding the survey to different parts or the entirety of Thailand would be beneficial. In addition, future studies may benefit from mixed-method designs or other-reported data.

## Conclusion

This study highlights that the presence of meaning in life among Thai Protestant Christians is impacted not only by the quality of human relationships but also by the nature of one's relationship with God. Attachment to God fully mediates the link between insecure attachment to others and the presence of meaning. These findings point to the profound psychological role of spiritual attachment in sustaining meaning—particularly in settings where individuals may face social marginalization—offering valuable insights for both psychological theory and pastoral practice.

## Ethics approval

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Medicine, Chiang Mai University (Cert. No. 473/2024; Research ID: PSY-2567-0579), valid from 24 December 2024 to 23 December 2025. All participants gave written informed consent and completed the questionnaire at their own pace.

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## Competing interests

All the authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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## Underlying data

Derived data supporting the findings of this study are available upon request from the corresponding author. Due to ethical restrictions, they are not publicly available.

### Declaration of artificial intelligence use

We hereby confirm that no artificial intelligence (AI) tools or methodologies were utilized at any stage of this study, including data collection, analysis, visualization, or manuscript preparation. The authors conducted all work presented in this study manually without the assistance of AI-based tools or systems.

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