Romantic Attachment In Young Adults Raised By Single Vs Two Parents

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Abstract- *This research examines how family structure—specifically, whether a young adult grew up in a single-parent or two-parent household—affects the way they form romantic attachments.*

Using the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) scale and the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI), data were collected from a targeted group of 200 young adults. The study looks into whether early caregiving experiences are connected to how adults feel about trust and intimacy in relationships. The findings show a weak, non-significant link (r = 0.066, p = 0.354) between how parents bonded with their children and the romantic attachment styles of adults. Additionally, no significant differences were found in attachment scores based solely on family structure.

Keywords: Adult Attachment, Family Structure, Parental Bonding, Romantic Relationships, Single Parenting

I. INTRODUCTION

Inside the home, life quietly shapes how people grow—emotions form, thinking patterns develop, and relationships begin to take shape.

It is not in school, but within the family home that understanding others first begins. Values are formed there, speech finds its rhythm, emotional responses learn their habits, and ideas about trust begin to take root. When safety exists, it creates quiet, stable structures in thoughts; when it is absent, it carves just as deep but different ones. These mental patterns influence identity, shift assumptions about affection, and steer people toward connection or push them away.

In late teens and early twenties, love starts to define who someone becomes more clearly alongside growing independence and deeper relationships.

The way emotions unfold in dating, how conflicts are handled, and whether trust feels possible or whether space is needed to protect oneself—these traits often carry traces of family patterns from earlier years. What happened in childhood homes often slips into adult relationships unnoticed. Old habits shape new ones, even if no one openly talks about it.

Today, family structures come in many forms.

No longer limited to the traditional model of two parents living together, more children now grow up with only one caregiver because of divorce, distance, or changing life situations. This leads to a question: might the early relationships in a child's life influence how they form attachments later on? While some homes face financial stress, irregular schedules, or inconsistent support, something deeper and quieter often shapes things—the way closeness is felt day in and day out. It's not about who lives in the house, but how steady and kind the moments between people are.

ADULT ATTACHMENT

Small moments with caregivers in early life help shape how affection develops over time.

Since infants react early and strongly, they begin to create quiet mental maps of what feels safe and reliable. As time passes, these patterns resurface—especially when relationships grow closer or emotions intensify. Safety felt in childhood often shows up again in adult relationships.

Adult relationships generally fall into two types: secure or insecure.

Feeling safe in close relationships often comes from childhood care that was consistent and kind, leaving a quiet sense of trust that challenges can be faced together. If early bonds were unstable, responses change—some people strongly fear being left, others block emotions to stay independent, while many swing between wanting closeness and pushing it away. A constant fear of losing someone leads to repeated checks for reassurance; this internal worry never stops. Others guard their personal space by staying distant, making isolation feel automatic. When relationships puzzle them now, it often traces back to early experiences that were unclear, leading to actions that surprise even the person doing them.

The way people feel in relationships varies depending on how close they become.

In trusting relationships, space allows for honesty instead of tension rising later. The way people learned to connect usually began when they were first learning about the world through their family. Notice how families interact—with that often shapes attachment habits without them even realizing it.

SINGLE PARENT AND TWO PARENT HOUSEHOLDS

Single parenting refers to a situation where one parent takes on all the responsibilities of raising a child.

This often happens when marriages end, couples separate, or one person chooses to raise children alone. The weight of tasks, decisions, and emotions falls more heavily on one person, which can make daily life more challenging and strain emotions. Children may miss out on different perspectives and face financial difficulties. Yet, strength can emerge through challenges, and independence can quietly develop, with family bonds deepening without much fanfare.

When responsibilities are shared, attention tends to improve, financial stress decreases, and cooperation appears in small, daily moments. However, what really affects outcomes is the emotional climate at home. If there are frequent arguments or rules that change without warning, children may struggle deeply—sometimes more than those in single-parent homes.

Families show strength not by their structure, but through consistent kindness, emotional connection, and trust that lasts.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Crowell et al. (2009) looked at how the long-term effects of parental divorce impact adult attachment. They used a longitudinal study design and asked participants to complete interviews about attachment, self-report questionnaires, and observations of couple interactions. The findings suggested that people from divorced families were more likely to have insecure attachment, especially anxious attachment, compared to those from families that remained intact. However, the study also indicated that divorce alone does not determine attachment styles. Instead, factors like the level of conflict between parents, how emotionally available they were, and the quality of parenting after the divorce were more important predictors. The study also noted that the behavior of partners played a role—those who were initially insecure in attachment tended to become more secure when they were in relationships with emotionally supportive partners. Overall, the study concluded that attachment outcomes are shaped by both early family experiences and later romantic relationships (Crowell et al., 2009).

Dinero et al. (2008) explored how early family relationships and later romantic experiences influence attachment security in adulthood. Using a longitudinal dataset, the researchers tracked participants from their teenage years into adulthood, assessing family interactions, romantic attachment, and partner behavior through questionnaires and observational tasks. The results showed that warm, emotionally supportive, and low-conflict family environments during adolescence were linked to better romantic attachment in later life. However, the study also highlighted that attachment is not fixed over time. People who had supportive romantic relationships later in life showed improvement in their attachment security, even if their early environment wasn't as favorable. Partner responsiveness, emotional understanding, and how couples handled conflict were important factors in improving attachment outcomes. The study emphasized that attachment is a lifelong process, influenced by both early caregiving experiences and the quality of adult relationships. The findings suggest that while family structure matters, the emotional climate and interactions within the family are more important in predicting long-term attachment security (Dinero et al., 2008).

Huri (2024) conducted a qualitative study to understand how romantic attachment and identity develop in young adults who were raised by single mothers. The study involved semi-structured interviews analyzed using thematic methods. Most participants reported strong emotional bonds with their mothers and secure attachment styles in their romantic relationships. Common themes included independence, emotional competence, and confidence in relationships. While some participants expressed curiosity about the absence of a father, this did not usually lead to insecurity. Instead, the study found that social stigma and assumptions from others had a bigger emotional impact than the family structure itself. Huri (2024) concluded that intentional parenting, emotional warmth, and consistent care are key to developing secure attachment, regardless of the number of parents involved (Huri, 2024).

An et al. (2022) investigated whether parental stress during childhood is linked to insecure attachment in adulthood. Participants completed questionnaires about their childhood upbringing and their current attachment styles. The study found that higher levels of reported parenting stress, especially in early childhood, were strongly connected to

anxious and avoidant attachment patterns in adulthood. Parental stress was associated with inconsistent care, less emotional warmth, and more conflict within the household. However, the study also noted that factors such as social support and later secure romantic relationships could help some individuals develop secure attachment, even if they experienced stress as children. The findings suggest that attachment is shaped by dynamic relationships rather than fixed family structures (An et al., 2022).

Kelly and Emery (2003) reviewed research on how children adjust after parental divorce, focusing on risk factors such as ongoing conflict, unstable caregiving, and financial stress, as well as protective factors like supportive environments and emotionally available caregivers.

Their review found that prolonged conflict and emotional disengagement between parents increased the risk of developing insecure attachment, which can affect how children form relationships later in life. However, the study also found that children in low-conflict post-divorce homes with supportive caregivers had adjustment outcomes similar to those from intact families. Although they did not directly measure romantic attachment, the study emphasized that early emotional stability is a key factor in shaping later relationship patterns (Kelly & Emery, 2003).

Mikulincer and Shaver (2016) provided a comprehensive review of research on adult attachment, discussing how early experiences with caregivers shape internal working models that influence adult romantic relationships.

The authors explained that secure attachment is associated with trust, comfort with intimacy, and emotional regulation, while insecure attachment can lead to fear of closeness, emotional struggles, and unstable relationships. Importantly, the authors stressed that attachment patterns are not set in stone; they can change with therapy or through supportive relationships. They also highlighted that the quality, consistency, and emotional environment of early caregiving are major factors in shaping attachment throughout life (Mikulincer& Shaver, 2016).

Furman and Wehner (1997) examined adolescent romantic relationships as a stage of development influenced by earlier attachment experiences.

The study highlighted that secure attachment during childhood is linked to better emotional regulation, communication, and intimacy in romantic relationships. Adolescents with insecure attachment often experience anxiety, dependency, or avoidance in their relationships. The authors emphasized that the quality of relationships, parental responsiveness, and emotional support are more important than the structure of the household in shaping attachment patterns. These findings suggest that young adults, whether raised by one or two parents, can develop secure romantic relationships if they had supportive and emotionally consistent caregiving in their early years (Furman & Wehner, 1997).

Hazan and Shaver (1987) conceptualized adult romantic love as an extension of early attachment experiences.

They used self-report questionnaires to identify three main attachment styles—secure, anxious, and avoidant—in adult romantic relationships. Secure individuals reported feelings of trust, comfort with intimacy, and relationship stability, while anxious individuals experienced fear of abandonment and avoidance individuals had difficulty with emotional closeness.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative, comparative research design to examine romantic attachment patterns in young adults aged 18 to 25 who were raised by either single parents or two parents.

A total of 200 participants were selected through purposive sampling from educational and community settings. The independent variable was family structure, while the dependent variables were attachment anxiety and avoidance. Data were collected using the Experiences in Close Relationships–Revised (ECR-R) and the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI), both of which are well-established and reliable tools. Ethical approval was obtained, and informed consent was obtained from all participants to ensure confidentiality and voluntary participation. The data were analyzed using SPSS, employing descriptive statistics and ANOVA, with a significance level of $p < .05$.

IV. RESULT & DISCUSSION

Not much separated young adults from one-parent homes versus two-parent ones when looking at love connections and family ties. A bit above average, those from solo-parent backgrounds scored on tests about closeness to parents. Still, the gap didn’t amount to much. Small numbers, big similarity.

Even though researchers looked closely, there was almost no clear link between how parents connect with their kids and how those kids later form romantic bonds ($r = 0.066$,

p = 0.354). Because of that tiny connection - or lack thereof - the idea that these two things strongly relate just didn't hold up.

Not one form of household setup stood out in how people attached to partners or felt about their parents - statistics confirmed it plainly (Wilks' Lambda = .993, p = .495). The way families were built didn't shift emotional patterns much at all.

Equal variances showed up clearly through Levene's check, while Box's M result backed consistent matrix patterns across groups. These checks together support the conditions needed for multivariate methods.

Looking deeper, ERP values stayed about the same no matter the family setup (F = 0.072, p = 0.789). PBI results followed a similar pattern (F = 1.383, p = 0.241), showing little variation between groups.

Finding things out shows family setup by itself isn't what shapes how young people connect in love relationships.

A child's bond grows stronger when care feels warm, not just because two adults are present. What matters most is how love shows up day by day. Presence without warmth doesn't build trust the way gentle attention does. Faces change, but consistency shapes security. Who gives comfort means less than how it's given.

Later on, things like friendships and love lives might shape how people connect more than their childhood home ever did.

From tough homes to stable ones, people who bounce back stronger show how much grit matters. What stands out is their ability to adjust when life shifts without warning. Not every childhood sets the stage for ease, yet some still find ways forward. When things fall apart, it's often flexibility that keeps them moving. Hardship does not always lead to collapse - some rebuild differently each time.

V. CONCLUSION

A look at how childhood home life connects to adult love lives was the focus here. Results show who you grew up with doesn't strongly shape your emotional habits in relationships. Whether someone had one parent or two didn't matter much when it came to worry or distance in romance. What stood out instead was how caring those parents were, not how many there were.

Even so, the findings showed only a faint link between how people saw their bond with parents and their romantic attachments. Not strong enough to mean much, really. Early closeness at home might not lock in adult love styles after all. Other moments matter too - moments spread out over years. Shaping how we attach seems to pull from many chapters, not just one.

What stands out in the research is how feelings of closeness, steady care, and encouragement matter far more than whether a family has one or two parents. Even when raised by just one caregiver, young people who knew reliable affection in childhood often built strong partnerships later on. Relationships with friends, personal personality traits, along with what life throws their way, can shape love connections too.

What stands out? It's less about which person takes charge raising a child, more about the way it's done. Stability in feeling safe comes first, ahead of any set family layout. How bonds grow depends on steady care, not on who provides it.

Limitations

Even though it added useful insights, the work came with clear drawbacks. One issue stood out - participants were all young adults enrolled at universities in just one urban area. Because of that setup, results might not hold up elsewhere, among older people, or across different cultures.

What people said might not match what they truly felt. Answers could lean toward what sounds better instead of what's real. Memory gaps likely shaped some replies too. How someone thought they were supposed to answer may have colored their choices. Truth gets fuzzy when recollection mixes with expectation.

Looking back, the study only took one snapshot, so seeing cause and effect between parent bonds and love connections gets tricky. With everything measured just once, tracking how those emotional ties shift across years stays out of reach.

Few key pieces got left out, even though they might matter a lot. Things like how kids get along with friends, feel about themselves, handle emotions, money at home, or where they come from - none of these showed up in the research, although they could've added depth to how bonds form.

Implications

Surprising what turns up when you look closely at family dynamics. Not every home needs two parents for kids to feel secure. What really matters? Steady care, someone who listens, routines that stick. Assumptions about broken homes fall apart here. Emotional presence outweighs household structure each time. Findings like these shift how experts view connection and development.

Trust doesn't always come easy, especially if closeness felt risky before. Pulling away when things get intense might make sense once you see the past clearly. Sometimes leaning too hard on a partner stems from missing steady support long ago.

Warm parents who listen well and stay steady help kids feel safe inside. Because of that, those children often handle grown-up relationships better later on.

Recommendations

Looking forward, future studies could involve a wider range of people from different cultures, economic backgrounds, and regions.

This broader approach may help make the findings more applicable across various groups. Including a diverse group of participants can reduce the limitations of the results. Voices from different walks of life can expand the reach of the research. When people come from different backgrounds and live in different settings, the patterns observed often change. Broader sampling can uncover insights that smaller studies might miss.

Looking back at the bonds formed in childhood may show how love develops over time, especially when examining changes over the years.

One way to observe this is by tracking how people evolve gradually. As patterns unfold over months or decades, hidden connections often emerge. Observing how closeness forms slowly helps distinguish between actual causes and coincidences. Time can reveal things that quick observations might overlook.

A closer examination of factors like self-confidence, emotional regulation, satisfaction in relationships, friendships, and support systems during stressful times may uncover deeper patterns influencing love connections.

Each of these factors may subtly influence how people form bonds in romantic relationships. Some aspects may be overlooked despite their importance. How we feel about ourselves often reflects in our closest relationships. Events outside a romantic relationship, such as support from friends, can influence what happens within the relationship. Emotional control might not always be immediately noticeable. The connection between daily interactions and long-term relationships requires more attention.

Exploring more ways to study this topic may reveal how early experiences influence adult relationships.

What researchers discover may depend on extending beyond current study limits. New perspectives could uncover patterns that were previously hidden. Going deeper tends to uncover what simpler approaches may have missed. How people form bonds later in life often reflects signals from earlier experiences. Further research can help gradually piece these connections together.

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