

The Interplay Between Childhood Family Relations, Self-Esteem, and Romantic Relationships Among Young Adults

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Abstract: The present research delves into the impact of early familial ties on the self-esteem and romantic relationships of the youth in India. The research presented that a loving, safe, and nurturing family environment develops high self-esteem and healthy romantic relationships in later life while a traumatic childhood results in low self-esteem and makes the individual prone to relationship issues. The study used a quantitative correlational design, involving the use of questionnaires assessing self-esteem, romantic relationship quality, and retrospective childhood family relationships of Indian young adults aged 18-25. The results served as a bridge towards comprehending the prolonged effects of the family and figuring out the way of interventions that can help them grow into healthy young adults.

Keywords: *Childhood Family Relations, Romantic Relationships, Self-Esteem, Young Adults, India.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

It is an extensively researched scientific fact that close relationships in early life heavily influence the development of core personality traits, not to mention the level of self-esteem and the capability of an individual to build secure and stable romantic bonds in adulthood. The first few years are the most important for the emotional and social development of the children, and they need to be treated in a very delicate and responsive way by their parents (Finders et al., 2023). Self-worth, emotional security, and relational forms of connection are established via these resources in the family of origin. Such as this, non-favourable family dynamics such as emotional neglect, parental conflict, or unsteady caregiving are the source of this lack of security and it results in low self-esteem and further relationship problems (Kernis, 2006).

Despite the well-known fact that family and its impact on emotional well-being are the utmost relevant, there is such a gap of information and knowledge about how family relations in childhood could influence self-esteem, and in the future, romantic relationships in young adults that this thing appears as next to impossible. This omission is very detrimental to the development of effective remedies for the reduction of relational problems as well as the restoration of self-perception, especially among the groups that are vulnerable.

This research studied how the early family interactions change to influence young adults' self-esteem and romantic relationships within India.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

➤ *Childhood Family Relationships*

Childhood family relationships refer to the relationships that children have with their parents, siblings, and extended family, which stay with them as they grow. Such relationships form the basis of a person's emotional, social, and psychological maturity as they offer love, trust, and a sense of a personal value. The different types range from secure to avoidant or ambivalent, thereby having an impact on the child's growth as well as their later relationships.

➤ *Romantic Relationships*

Romantic relationships are personal connections which typically involve love, sharing of emotions and physical intimacy, being committed to each other, and mutual liking. Such relationships are based on trust, communication, and shared experiences, thereby making the relationship journey longer and deeper, right from the stage of attraction to the stage of strong bond. These relationships have a significant impact on individuation and emotional health, thus being universal.

➤ *Self-Esteem*

Self-esteem is essentially the culmination of an individual's personal belief that they are worthy and valuable. It explains self-respect, self-belief, and overall mental well-being. While low self-esteem can result in anxiety, loneliness, and a lack of life satisfaction, high self-esteem is the cause of energy, positive relationships with others, and the ability to bounce back from difficult times.

Various studies show that a supportive family environment is the main factor in the development of self-esteem and the establishment of healthy romantic relationships in love with the socio-economic background of the individual (Orth & Robins, 2014; Conger et al., 2010). The main findings of the research show that a warm family environment, emotional validation, and a reduction in conflicts lead to positive self-esteem, secure attachment, and relationship satisfaction. On the other hand, persistent economic difficulties and family quarrels have a negative impact on these results (Chan & Lo, 2016; Moretti & Peled, 2004; Deitz et al., 2015; Widman et al., 2016; Don & Mickelson, 2014; Fincham & Beach, 2010; Pietromonaco & Beck, 2015; Xia et al., 2018). The longitudinal designs lend credence to these results; however, the dependence on self-reports suggests that the results should be interpreted with caution. These findings emphasize the importance of family support as a primary factor in shaping the romantic skills and self-esteem of young people.

➤ Proposed Hypothesis

Based on the literature, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

- H1: There is no significant relationship between the family relations experienced during childhood and self-esteem in young adulthood.
- H2: There is no significant relationship in the quality of childhood family relationships with the level of love recorded in the romantic adult lives of young adults.
- H3: There is no significant relationship between the quality of childhood family relationships and the level of conflict recorded in young adults' romantic relationships.
- H4: There is no significant relationship between the quality of childhood family relationships and the level of ambivalence recorded in young adults' romantic relationships.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research is a quantitative correlational study, which means it looks at the relationships between variables through statistical analysis to find patterns, but it does not suggest any causal relationship. The study design is suitable for making generalizations from big samples and can be used for measuring such variables as childhood family relationships, self-esteem, and romantic relationships.

➤ Sample and Data Collection Procedure

The study took place from September 2024 to April 2025. Participants were sourced from social media, university clubs, and community organizations. Upon screening and identifying those who meet the inclusion criteria, they were invited to participate in the study. Informed consent was obtained from participants prior to their participation to assure them that they have a full understanding of the purpose, procedures, and potential implications of the study.

The sample was composed of 236 young adults 18-25 years old (Peng et al., 2020) in a romantic relationship. In order to meet the objectives of this study, purposive sampling

was applied. What this means is that participants fitting the specified criteria pertinent to the research questions were intentionally selected, thus ensuring that the sample included people likely to give meaningful information on childhood family relations on self-esteem and romantic relationships (Bullard, 2024; Peng et al., 2020).

➤ Measurement Instruments

The questionnaires used 5, 4, and 7-point Likert Scales simultaneously:

- Risky Families Questionnaire (Taylor et al., 2004)
- The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)
- The Braiker and Kelley's Relationship Quality Questionnaire – Love, Conflict, Ambivalence (Braiker and Kelley, 1979)

➤ Data Analysis Method

SPSS software was used to analyze the quantitative data, while Spearman Correlational analysis was employed to examine how childhood family relationships operated to affect self-esteem and romantic relationship quality among the participants.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

➤ Frequencies

Table 1 Age

AGE		
	N	%
18	4	1.7 %
19	10	4.2 %
20	6	2.5 %
21	26	11.0 %
22	102	43.0 %
23	54	22.8 %
24	16	6.8 %
25	18	7.6 %
Age	1	0.4 %

Table 2 Gender

GENDER		
	N	%
Female	188	79.3 %
Gender	1	0.4 %
Male	48	20.3 %

Table 3 Familytype

FAMILYTYPE		
	N	%
Family Background	1	0.4%
Grandparent Family (absence of parents)	2	0.8%
Joint Family	32	13.5%
Nuclear Family	186	78.5%
Single-Parent Family	16	6.8%

Table 4 Lived with

LIVEDWITH		
	N	%
During childhood (at approx. 5-15 years of age)	1	0.4%
Lived with both parents	216	91.1%
Lived with one parent	8	3.4%
Lived with other family members (e.g., grandparents, aunts/uncles)	12	5.1%

The frequencies indicate that the majority of participants were 22 years old (43.0%), followed by those aged 23 (22.8%) and 21 (11.0%), with smaller proportions in other age groups, suggesting a predominantly young adult sample. Most respondents identified as female (79.3%), while males comprised 20.3% of the sample, and a negligible percentage did not specify their gender. Regarding family structure, the vast majority reported living in nuclear families (78.5%), with joint families (13.5%) and single-parent families (6.8%) being less common; only a small fraction grew up in grandparent-headed households (0.8%).

In terms of childhood living arrangements, 91.1% lived with both parents between the ages of 5 and 15, while 3.4% lived with one parent and 5.1% with other relatives, indicating most participants had a traditional two-parent upbringing. These frequencies highlight a sample characterized by young adults, predominantly female, from nuclear families, and with stable two-parent childhood environments, which may influence the generalizability of the findings to broader or more diverse populations (APA, 2020).

➤ Descriptive Statistics

Table 5 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
RFQ	236	13	55	30.63	10.251
SELFESTEEM	236	14	40	29.66	5.554
LOVE	236	1	7	6.03	1.117
CONFLICT	236	1	6	3.15	1.028
AMBIVALENCE	236	1	6	2.52	1.389
Valid N (listwise)	236				

The descriptive statistics reveal that, among the 236 participants, the mean score for the Risky Families Questionnaire (RFQ) was 30.63 (SD = 10.25), indicating a moderately low level of family conflict, aggression, and neglect in their formative years. Self-esteem scores averaged 29.66 (SD = 5.55) out of a possible 40, suggesting generally positive self-regard among participants. The mean score for love was high at 6.03 (SD = 1.12) on a 7-point scale, reflecting strong feelings of love in participants' relationships. Conflict had a moderate mean of 3.15 (SD = 1.03) on a 6-point scale, implying that while disagreements were present, they were not extreme (i.e. moderate levels of conflict). Ambivalence showed a lower mean of 2.52 (SD = 1.39) out of 6, suggesting

that most participants experienced relatively low levels of mixed or conflicting feelings in their relationships.

Together, these results indicate that the sample generally reported healthy self-esteem and strong love, with moderate conflict and low ambivalence, which may contribute to overall positive relationship functioning. These patterns provide context for further analyses and suggest that the group studied is relatively well-adjusted in terms of relationship dynamics (APA, 2020).

➤ Spearman Correlation

Table 6 Correlation

Correlations			RFQ	SELFESTEEM	AGE	LOVE	AMBIVALENCE	CONFLICT
Spearman's rho	RFQ	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.334**	.082	-.223**	.168**	.198**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	.211	<.001	.010	.002
		N	236	236	236	236	236	236
	SELFESTEEM	Correlation Coefficient	-.334**	1.000	.006	.223**	-.179**	-.235**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		.928	<.001	.006	<.001
		N	236	236	236	236	236	236
	AGE	Correlation Coefficient	.082	.006	1.000	.019	-.081	.010
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.211	.928		.774	.215	.881
		N	236	236	236	236	236	236
	LOVE	Correlation Coefficient	-.223**	.223**	.019	1.000	-.677**	-.631**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	.774		<.001	<.001
		N	236	236	236	236	236	236
	AMBIVALENCE	Correlation Coefficient	.168**	-.179**	-.081	-.677**	1.000	.688**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.010	.006	.215	<.001		<.001
		N	236	236	236	236	236	236
	CONFLICT	Correlation Coefficient	.198**	-.235**	.010	-.631**	.688**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	<.001	.881	<.001	<.001	
		N	236	236	236	236	236	236

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A negative correlation was found between the responses to the Risky Families Questionnaire (RFQ) and self-esteem based on a non-parametric correlation coefficient ($\rho = -0.334$, $p < .001$), which means that dysfunction in the family during childhood is associated with low self-esteem in young adulthood. The scores of the RFQ also had a negative relationship with the Love subscale ($\rho = -0.223$, $p < .001$), which suggests that the level of love as well as the emotional closeness in romantic adult relationships decreases as the degree of the adverse family environment increases.

Moreover, the scores of the RFQ were positively correlated with the Conflict ($\rho = 0.198$, $p = 0.002$) and Ambivalence ($\rho = 0.168$, $p = 0.010$) subscales, indicating that issues in the family of origin lead to an increase in conflicts and the presence of ambivalent feelings in romantic relationships. The results of the statistical test showed that all the null hypotheses concerning these variables were rejected, thus childhood family quality was found to have a significant effect on self-esteem as well as different dimensions of romantic relationships in young adults.

➤ Discussion

The study uncovers that the negative emotional health caused by a childhood dysfunctional family has a significant effect on the self-esteem and intimate relationships of young adults. This means that early adverse family environments have a strong negative association with self-esteem and love and a positive one with conflict and romantic relationships ambivalence. The outcomes of this study support the findings of previous studies which indicate that dysfunctional families are characterized by the lack of good communication, emotional neglect, and abuse, thereby children's emotional growth and social skills get hampered. As a result, children may grow up with the inability to trust, difficulty in regulating emotions, and instability in relationships.

Exposure to adversity during childhood can have long-lasting effects on one's mental health and can cause a drop in self-worth which in turn makes romantic relationships complicated. However, the presence of resilience and positive support from outside can counteract the negative effects to some extent. Knowledge of these issues help the need of initiatives that intend to improve family environments and support young adults in developing healthy self-esteem and relationship skills, which in turn contribute to better emotional regulation and relational satisfaction. The findings have implications not only for mental health services but also for preventive family-focused support programs.

V. CONCLUSION

This research looked into how family relations during the childhood, self-esteem, and the quality of romantic relationships in young adults are connected. It used the Risky Families Questionnaire (RFQ), Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and the love, conflict, and ambivalence subscales of Braiker and Kelley's Relationship Quality Questionnaire. The data disclosed that the risk and dysfunction relations in childhood family environments were notably correlated with low self-esteem ($\rho = -.334$, $p < .001$), less love ($\rho = -.223$, $p < .001$), more conflict ($\rho = .198$, $p = .002$), and greater ambivalence ($\rho = .168$, $p = .010$) in romantic relationships. The outcomes from this research led to the dismissal of the four null hypotheses, thus showing that the quality of family relationships during childhood still affects one's psychological well-being and adult relationship functioning.

The study's results support attachment theory and the previous studies, which argue the strong influence of the first family experiences on the self-concept and relational patterns (Bowlby, 1982; Orth, Robins, & Widaman, 2012; Repetti, Taylor, & Seeman, 2002). In brief, the findings point to the

significance of the family's early life in raising self-esteem and the quality of romantic relationships during young adulthood.

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