



BSc Psychology
Department of Psychology

**Adult Children of Divorce and Their Attitudes
Towards Romantic Long-term Relationships:
Comparison Between Genders**

June, 2024

Student: Rakel Sif Mánadóttir

ID number: 021202-2310

Foreword

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the BSc Psychology degree, Reykjavik University, this thesis is presented in the style of an article for submission to a peer-reviewed journal.

Abstract

Individuals who have experienced their parents' divorce often encounter adverse effects that shape their attitudes and views toward romantic relationships. The current research strived to examine if adult children of divorce and individuals from intact families have significantly different attitudes toward romantic long-term relationships by using the Revised Adult Attachment Scale, consisting of two subscales: anxiety and avoid. Furthermore, the study also explored whether there were any gender differences in these attitudes. In total, 176 participants took part in the study by responding to an online survey. Findings revealed that adult children of divorce experience more anxiety and avoidance toward romantic long-term relationships compared to individuals from intact families. Additionally, the analysis revealed that females experience more anxiety than males toward romantic long-term relationships. However, there was no significant difference between the genders in terms of avoidance of romantic long-term relationships. Moreover, there was no relationship between family structure (intact families vs. divorced families) and gender regarding anxiety and avoid subscales. For future studies, it would be optimal to examine whether different types of divorces have diverse effects on the attitudes of adult children of divorce toward romantic relationships and how these effects can be minimized.

Keywords: adult children of divorce, intact families, romantic long-term relationships, gender, revised adult attachment scale

Útdráttur

Einstaklingar sem hafa upplifað skilnað foreldra sinna verða oft fyrir skaðlegum áhrifum og það getur mótað viðhorf þeirra og skoðanir á rómantískum samböndum. Í núverandi rannsókn var markmiðið að kanna hvort skilnaðarbörn og einstaklingar frá óbrotnum fjölskyldum hafi marktækt ólík viðhorf til rómantískra langtímasambanda með því að nota the Revised Adult Attachment Scale sem samanstendur af tveimur undirkvörðum: kvíði og forðun. Núverandi rannsókn kannaði einnig hvort það væri kynjamunur á þessum viðhorfum. Alls tóku 176 þátttakendur þátt í rannsókninni með því að svara netkönnun. Niðurstöður leiddu í ljós að skilnaðarbörn upplifa meiri kvíða og forðun gagnvart rómantískum langtímasamböndum samanborið við einstaklinga frá óbrotnum fjölskyldum. Niðurstöður sýndu einnig fram á að konur upplifa meiri kvíða en karlar varðandi rómantísk langtímasambönd. Hins vegar var enginn marktækur munur á kynjunum hvað varðar forðun gagnvart rómantískum langtímasamböndum. Þar að auki var ekkert samband á milli samsetningu fjölskyldu (óbrotnar fjölskyldur vs. skilnaðarfjölskyldur) og kyns varðandi kvíða og forðun undirkvörðana. Fyrir framtíðarrannsóknir væri ákjósanlegt að kanna hvort mismunandi gerðir af skilnaði hafi ólík áhrif á viðhorf skilnaðarbarna til rómantískra sambanda og hvernig hægt sé að lágmarka þau áhrif.

Lykilorð: skilnaðarbörn, óbrotnar fjölskyldur, rómantísk langtímasambönd, kyn, revised adult attachment scale

Adult Children of Divorce and Their Attitudes Towards Romantic Long-term Relationships: Comparison Between Genders

Family structure can play a pivotal role in the lives of many individuals, impacting them in various ways. Family structures come in all shapes and sizes; however, some are more widely encountered (Wasserman, 2020). Research on family structure has revealed that the prevalence of individuals with divorced parents as a family structure has increased throughout the years across many nations (Pronzato & Aassve, 2019; Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007). Therefore, studies on divorce have expanded throughout the years, and many factors within it have been analyzed (Amato, 2010). Divorce holds diverse meanings for many; some perceive it as a negative step, while others see it as a positive move. The circumstances surrounding a divorce shape the way individuals look at it. Divorce affects many individuals, both the people who are going through it and also the individuals who are close to the divorcees. The effects can come in various shapes and sizes. For some, the effects are minimal, while others are intensely affected by the divorce (Cui et al., 2010).

As mentioned above, numerous factors concerning divorce have been analyzed, and one of those factors has to do with the consequences of divorce for children (Amato & James, 2010). Former studies have revealed that children with divorced parents face more significant challenges across various aspects of life, such as outcomes related to health, emotional and behavioral well-being, academic performance, and romantic relationships (Anderson, 2014; Braithwaite et al., 2016). The adverse impact that children of divorce endure following their parents' divorce has the possibility to persist into their adult years (Amato, 2010). Therefore, it is essential to understand these effects to be more aware of them and to prevent them in the future.

Past research has examined in great detail how adult children of divorce perceive romantic relationships, marriages, and divorces, as parental divorce can be a significant influencing factor regarding those aspects. A study carried out by Cui and Fincham (2010) revealed that children of divorce often have adverse attitudes and perspectives towards marriage. However, Cui and Fincham (2010) discovered that parental divorce is not always the cause for the adverse views. In some cases, the relationship during the parents' marriage is the sole reason. In addition, findings from the same study also conveyed that individuals with divorced parents commonly display lesser devotion to marriage compared to individuals with married parents. At times, adult children of divorce view divorce as a way to address marital issues and challenges (Cui & Fincham, 2010). Similarly, Amato and James (2010) and Miralles et al. (2023) revealed that adult children of divorce often encounter more friction in their marriages and are more in jeopardy of ending in divorce. Building on this understanding, findings from Cui et al. (2010) displayed that adult children of divorce have a more positive outlook towards divorce than individuals with married parents. The positive outlook towards divorce has been linked with less devotion towards romantic partnerships and an increased likelihood of relationship separation.

Furthermore, an intriguing finding from Cui et al. (2010) revealed that the participants who noticed less parental friction possessed greater optimism toward marriage and had a somewhat unfavorable attitude toward divorce. On the other hand, participants who noticed friction between their parents were not as optimistic toward marriage and were more likely to experience relationship separation in their romantic relationships. The findings from the same study also showed that children of divorce may experience anxiety and uneasiness towards long-term commitments, such as marriages, mainly if much friction follows their parents' marriage (Cui et al., 2010). Therefore, parents must address their divorce correctly and have their children's best interests in mind.

Similar to Cui and Fincham (2010) and Cui et al. (2010), Braithwaite et al. (2016) also conducted a study on adult children of divorce and their views on relationship traits. In that study, it was revealed that adult children of divorce are more inclined to end their marriage in divorce because they mimic their parents' challenging relationship patterns in their romantic partnerships. An interesting finding from the same study was that adult children of divorce exhibited elevated rates of troubled communication and friction in their romantic relationships. As referenced above, parental friction can greatly impact children's future romantic relationships. This is echoed in Braithwaite et al. (2016) study, which disclosed that among participants with divorced parents, parental friction was linked with more insecure attachment styles and poor conflict control. Parents' behaviors during and after the divorce can profoundly impact their children's feelings about relationships, extending beyond the divorce alone (Smith-Etxeberria et al., 2022).

Past studies have also analyzed gender differences when it comes to this topic. Lee (2019) studied teenagers' parental relationships after divorce to recognize the impact of parental divorce on romantic relationships. The findings indicated that daughters' teenage relationships with fathers influenced their romantic lives, unlike sons' relationships, which showed no significant correlation. The reason for that finding was not evident. However, there were suspicions that it was because girls are commonly encouraged more than boys to prioritize relationships. Lee (2019) is not alone in studying gender differences. Jacquet et al. (2001) also explored this topic, and similarly to Lee, Jacquet et al. (2001) found that females were more affected by their parent's divorce, specifically concerning romantic relationships. Females from divorced backgrounds showed reduced trust in their partner's goodwill and experienced heightened conflicts and adversarial feelings compared to females from intact families. While men from divorced backgrounds also encountered obstacles, more research is needed to grasp gender disparities in this domain fully (Jacquet et al., 2001).

Furthermore, research conducted in 2022 examined attachment styles in romantic relationships. The findings of that research displayed that when examining gender differences, females were more inclined to be anxious and avoidant towards romantic relationships. In addition, the findings revealed that females were more likely to experience less secure attachment in romantic relationships (Tosun et al., 2022).

Current study

Based on the information above, adults who experienced parental divorce during their childhood are more likely to encounter relationship obstacles and challenges compared to adults from intact families. However, no two people are the same, leading to various responses to situations (Anderson, 2014). Even though past research in this field has delivered informative and educational data, further investigation is essential. The necessity arises from a common limitation observed in the previously cited studies. To clarify, the studies often used imbalanced samples. The gender ratio was often unequal, indicating a need for expanded diversity. There were considerably more female than male participants in most studies (Cui & Fincham, 2010; Cui et al., 2010; Jacquet et al., 2001; Lee, 2019; Tosun et al., 2022). Therefore, there is a need for more studies that aim to have an equal gender ratio to receive results that are as reliable as possible. Most studies in this field are conducted in The United States of America (Braithwaite et al., 2016; Cui & Fincham, 2010; Cui et al., 2010; Jacquet et al., 2001; Lee, 2019). Therefore, there is a call for broader diversity across ethnic groups in research samples. Consequently, examining this topic in more detail with Icelandic society in mind is essential since, based on current knowledge, few studies in this field have been conducted where Icelandic participants partake. The current study aims to answer three of the following research questions:

RQ1: Do children of divorce have different attitudes towards romantic long-term relationships compared to individuals from intact families?

RQ2: Do attitudes towards romantic long-term relationships differ between genders?

RQ3: Does parental divorce have a different effect on attitudes towards romantic long-term relationships based on gender?

Method

Participants

A snowball sample was enlisted through an online survey displayed on Icelandic accounts on Facebook and Instagram. The entire sample consisted of 176 participants aged 18 to 76. A summary of the sample statistics is displayed in **Table 1**. The average age of the participants was 29.9 ($SD = 13.4$), reflecting a wide age range. The gender ratio was somewhat imbalanced, with a majority of women participating, 133 women (75.6%), 41 men (23.3%), and 2 (1.1%) non-binary individuals participated in the study. Given that only two participants selected the “non-binary” option, their results were not evaluated when analyzing group differences. In terms of education, the majority of participants, 100 (56.8%) in total, had completed high school. When asked about their relationship status, most participants, or 68 (38.6%) individuals, said they were in a relationship.

Table 1*Descriptive statistic of the sample by gender, age, education, and relationship status*

Variables	N	%
Sex		
Male	41	23.3%
Female	133	75.6%
Non-binary	2	1.1%
Age		
Emerging adults (18-25)	116	65.9%
Adults (26+)	60	34.1%
Education		
Completed elementary school	7	4.0%
Completed high school	100	56.8%
Completed trade and apprenticeship	13	4.5%
Completed bachelor's degree	38	19.3%
Completed master's degree	43	14.2%
Completed doctoral degree	3	1.1%
Relationship status		
Single	53	30.1%
In a relationship	68	38.6%
In cohabitation	22	12.5%
Married	33	18.8%

The descriptive statistics regarding family structure, parental marriage status, age at parental divorce, and parents' relationship before, during, and after the separation are displayed in Appendix A. Regarding family structure, the majority of participants, 87 (49.4%) in total, had parents who were cohabitating. The second largest group consisted of 72 (40.9%) participants with parents who were not cohabitating. Regarding the marriage status of the participants' parents, 55 (69.6%) participants had parents who had been in a marriage, while 24 (30.4%) had parents who had not been in a marriage. Most participants whose parents had undergone divorce were in the 10 to 15 age group (38.2%) at the time of the divorce.

When participants were asked to reflect on their parents' relationship before the separation, most participants, or 34 (43.0%), described it as negative and non-loving. Similarly, when asked about their parents' separation, the majority, 51 (65.4%), characterized

it as unstable, not understanding, and disrespectful. In terms of the relationship between the participants' parents after the separation, most participants, or 35 (44.9%) individuals, described the relationship as negative and non-loving.

Procedure

An online survey was generated using the QuestionPro online survey platform to gather data. The online survey was first presented online on March 19th, 2024, and remained open for one month. The initial page of the survey provided the respondents with information regarding the purpose of the study. The respondents were also provided information about their rights as participants. Participants under the age of 18 were not able to partake in the study. Respondents were made aware that the survey was anonymous and that they could exit the study whenever desired. It was also emphasized that the participants should answer with utmost honesty and that there were no right or wrong answers. Respondents had to give their consent before they could start the survey. The online survey included 11 questions; however, question 11 consisted of 18 items (the two subscales), making the total number of questions 28. Respondents generally spent 5 minutes completing the online survey. No monetary reward was provided to participants for partaking in the study.

Measures

The measuring instrument of this research was an online questionnaire that consisted of necessary demographic information and the Revised Adult Attachment Scale.

Demographic information

Details regarding gender, age, education, and relationship status were collected. Moreover, specifics regarding family structure, parental marriage status, age at parental divorce, and parents' relationship before, during, and after the separation were also gathered.

This research design therefore consisted of 10 independent variables. The first four independent variables in the current study were background variables: gender (women, men, or non-binary), age (18+), education (completed elementary school, completed high school, completed trade and apprenticeship, completed bachelor's degree, completed master's degree, or completed doctoral degree), and relationship status (single, in a relationship, in cohabitation, or married). The fifth independent variable was related to the participants' family structure (parents in cohabitation, parents never in cohabitation, parents are not in cohabitation, or other). The individuals who selected the answer options 'parents are not in cohabitation' and 'other' were then asked to answer the following five questions. The first question asked whether the participants' parents had been married (yes or no).

Moreover, the next question asked at what age the participants were when the parents divorced. That independent variable was called participants' age at parental divorce (0-5 years old, 5-10 years old, 10-15 years old, 15-20 years old, 20+, or does not apply). The participants were then asked to answer questions regarding the relationship between the parents before, during, and after the separation. Those independent variables were: parental relationship before separation (positive and loving, negative and non-loving, or neutral), parental relationship during separation (stable, understanding, and respectful, unstable, not understanding, and disrespectful, or neutral), and parental relationship after separation (positive and loving, negative and non-loving, or neutral).

The Revised Adult Attachment Scale

The Revised Adult Attachment Scale was designed by Collins in 1996 to examine individuals' feelings and attitudes toward romantic relationships. The original scoring method computes three subscales: close, depend, and anxiety. Each subscale comprises six items, resulting in the Revised Adult Attachment Scale consisting of 18 items (Teixeira et al., 2019) (e.g., see Appendix B). The Revised Adult Attachment Scale has been employed in previous

studies, and the subscales have displayed good reliability. For example, in three samples of undergraduates, Cronbach's alpha for each subscale exceeded 0.750, indicating strong reliability. However, the Revised Adult Attachment Scale also provides an alternative scoring method. The current study evaluated the alternative scoring method as more fitting than the original scoring instructions. This alternative scoring computes two subscales: anxiety and avoid. The anxiety subscale consists of 6 items, while the avoid subscale consists of 12 items (Collins, 2008). Hence, anxiety and avoid were the two dependent variables examined in the current study.

Anxiety: Anxiety is a six-item scale regarding how concerned individuals are about lack of love and experiencing rejection. All of the items involve an ordinal scale. The first two items in this subscale address worries about romantic partners' love and hesitation to connect. This subscale's third and fourth items concern fears regarding partners' mutual affection and commitment. Moreover, items five and six in this subscale focus on uncertainty about partners' care and worries about getting hurt. Participants could select scores ranging from 1 to 5, with one representing "Not at all characteristic of me", two representing "Not characteristic of me", three representing "Neutral", four representing "Characteristic of me", and five representing "Very characteristic of me" (Collins, 2008).

Avoid: Avoid is a 12-item scale that assesses an individual's level of avoidance toward emotional connections or intimacy with others. All of the items involve an ordinal scale. The first three items in this subscale concern the comfort of getting close to people, the struggle in depending on others, and the comfort of counting on others. Items four, five, and six in this subscale focus on comfort with intimacy and dependability of others. The seventh, eighth, and ninth items in this subscale address worries and comfort regarding closeness and confidence in dependability from others. Finally, the last three items in this subscale focus on difficulties in trusting others, comfort level regarding emotional intimacy, and uncertainty

concerning the dependability of others. Participants could select scores ranging from 1 to 5, with one representing “Not at all characteristic of me”, two representing “Not characteristic of me”, three representing “Neutral”, four representing “Characteristic of me”, and five representing “Very characteristic of me” (Collins, 2008).

Data analysis

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28.0 was the statistical software used for all data analyses. Regarding data analyses, the first step was the application of descriptive statistics. Frequencies for all the independent variables were evaluated, and mean and standard deviation were also examined for the independent variable concerning age. Moreover, the translation of the 18-item Revised Adult Attachment Scale had to be examined before further analyses could be carried out. The quality of the list was examined by conducting an exploratory factor analysis and analyzing the factor structure and the reliability of the subscales. It was vital to examine how the factor structure and reliability presented itself in an Icelandic sample and evaluate if it was comparable to the scoring methods offered by the Revised Adult Attachment Scale. The exploratory factor analysis was carried out using the principal axis factoring method with Promax rotation. Promax rotation was used since it was assumed that there would be a correlation between the factors, and Promax rotation allows that.

The exploratory factor was first carried out with three factors to extract, as the original scoring method for the Revised Adult Attachment Scale consisted of three subscales. However, the three subscales for the current study did not quite match the original three subscales. Furthermore, the scree plot implied that two factors were sufficient. As a result, the exploratory factor was repeated but with two factors to extract. Three items had to be removed from the statistical analysis as one item did not meet the minimum requirement of having a primary factor loading of 0.4 or higher. The other two items were excluded because

those items were cross-loading. After removing the three items from the analytical model and conducting the analysis again, the scree plot still indicated that the two factors were satisfactory. The KMO score revealed that the sampling adequacy was .897 ($\chi^2(105) = 1450.300, p < .001$). Therefore, the sample was very suitable for exploratory factor analysis. The exploratory factor analysis also revealed that the correlation between the two factors was 0.622, indicating a moderately strong positive relationship. Combined, the factors accounted for 50.6% of the variance.

Furthermore, before the data analyses could continue, it was essential to reverse code four items from the avoid subscale. Items numbered 12, 5, 14, and 1 required reverse coding. The four items had negative factor loadings as they were worded negatively. Following the reverse coding, total scores were created for the anxiety and avoid subscales. The total scores were created by calculating the mean (average) of the items that adhered to each subscale. To clarify, items 11, 9, 3, 10, 15, and 4 created the total score for anxiety, and items 12, 13, 5, 8, 7, 1, 14, 18, and 17 created the total score for avoidance. The total scores ranged from 1 to 5, where low values equaled less anxiety/avoidance towards romantic relationships and high values equaled more anxiety/avoidance towards romantic relationships. The internal consistency reliability of the two subscales was then examined using McDonald's omega. The two factors, anxiety and avoid, can be observed in **Table 2**.

Two analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted to examine the three research questions. An independent variable, IntactvsDivorce, was created to compare participants from intact families with those from divorced families. IntactvsDivorce was characterized by two values: 1 indicating participants from intact families and 2 indicating children of divorce. Participants from intact families stands for those who chose the option 'parents in cohabitation' regarding family structure ($N = 85$). Children of divorce refers to those participants who selected 'yes' when asked if their parents had been married ($N = 55$).

Gender was also employed as an independent variable in the ANOVA. Gender was characterized by two values: 1 for males and 2 for women.

Table 2

Summary of exploratory factor analysis results for the two subscales, anxiety and avoid, from the Revised Adult Attachment Scale

Revised Adult Attachment Scale	Factor loading
Factor 1: Anxiety, $\omega = .919$	
11. I often wonder whether romantic partners really care about me	.958
9. I often worry that romantic partners won't want to stay with me	.946
3. I often worry that romantic partners don't really love me	.908
10. When I show my feelings for others, I'm afraid they will not feel the same about me	.719
15. I want to get close to people, but I worry about being hurt	.676
4. I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like	.502
Factor 2: Avoid, $\omega = .846$	
12. I am comfortable developing close relationships with others	-.730
13. I am uncomfortable when anyone gets too emotionally close to me	.684
5. I am comfortable depending on others	-.651
8. I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others	.628
7. I find that people are never there when you need them	.576
1. I find it relatively easy to get close to people	-.542
14. I know that people will be there when I need them	-.539
18. I am not sure that I can always depend on people to be there when I need them	.534
17. Romantic partners often want me to be emotionally closer than I feel comfortable being	.460

Note. ω = McDonald's Omega.

Results

Romantic relationship attitudes: Divorced vs. intact families

Descriptive statistics for participants from intact families and those with divorced parents concerning the anxiety subscale are displayed in **Table 3**. The data revealed that the majority of participants were women in both groups, with 60 participants from intact families and 46 from divorced families.

Table 3

Descriptive statistics for participants from intact families and participants with divorced parents in relation to the anxiety subscale

Dependent Variable: Anxiety				
IntactvsDivorce	Gender	M	SD	N
Intact family	Male	2.03	.95	25
	Female	2.77	1.03	60
	Total	2.55	1.06	85
Children of divorce	Male	2.87	.94	9
	Female	3.34	1.05	46
	Total	3.27	1.04	55
Total	Male	2.25	1.00	34
	Female	3.02	1.08	106
	Total	2.83	1.11	140

The analyses of variance (ANOVA) revealed that there was a significant difference between individuals from intact families and individuals from divorced families regarding the anxiety subscale $F(1, 136) = 10.06, p = .002$. Individuals from intact families had an average score of 2.55 in terms of the anxiety subscale. On the other hand, individuals from divorced families scored on average 3.27 on the anxiety subscale, which was 0.72 points greater than the average score for individuals from intact families. The effect sizes were also examined to evaluate the magnitude of the relationships between the variables. The partial eta squared (η^2_{partial}) effect size for the anxiety subscale was 0.069, indicating that the independent

variable (IntactvsDivorce) explained close to 6.9% of the variance in the anxiety dependent variable.

Descriptive statistics for participants from intact families and those with divorced parents in relation to the avoid subscale are displayed in **Table 4**. An ANOVA test revealed that there was a significant difference between individuals from intact families and individuals from divorced families regarding the avoid subscale $F(1, 136) = 9.08, p = .003$. Individuals from intact families scored on average 2.16 in terms of the avoid subscale. However, individuals from divorced families had an average score of 2.53 in terms of the avoid subscale. The average score for adult children of divorce concerning the avoid subscale was 0.37 points higher than that of individuals from intact families.

Table 4

Descriptive statistics for participants from intact families and participants with divorced parents in relation to the avoid subscale

Dependent Variable: Avoid				
IntactvsDivorce	Gender	M	SD	N
Intact family	Male	2.00	.56	25
	Female	2.23	.73	60
	Total	2.16	.69	85
Children of divorce	Male	2.59	.49	9
	Female	2.52	.68	46
	Total	2.53	.65	55
Total	Male	2.16	.60	34
	Female	2.35	.71	106
	Total	2.31	.69	140

Concerning the avoid subscale, the partial eta squared (η^2_{partial}) effect size was 0.063, which revealed that the independent variable (IntactvsDivorce) explained approximately 6.3% of the variance in the avoid dependent variable.

Romantic relationship attitudes: Gender differences

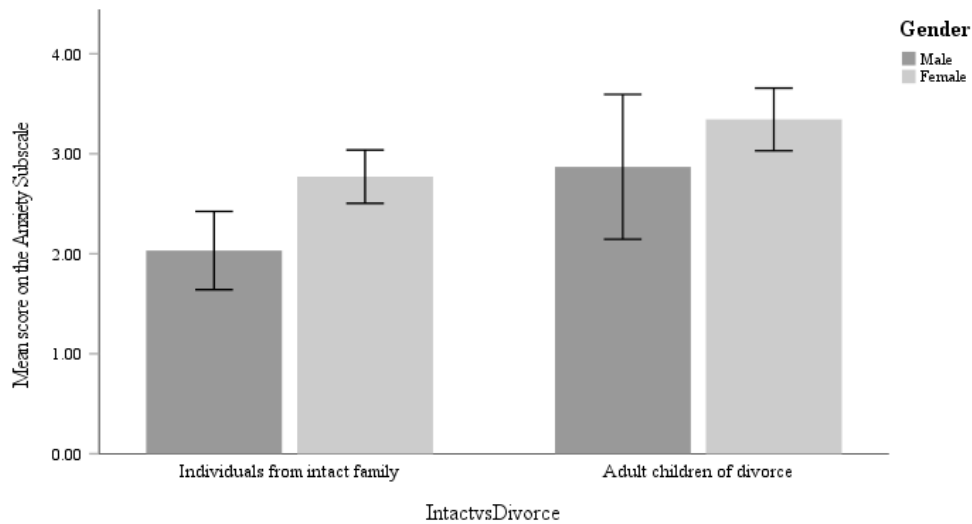
When analyzing the gender differences, female's scores on the anxiety subscale were, on average, 0.77 points greater than the men's scores, which indicates statistically significant differences between groups $F(1, 136) = 7.45, p = .007, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.052$. On the other hand, the difference between the average female's and men's scores on the avoid subscale was 0.19. Therefore, there was no significant difference between the genders $F(1, 136) = .270, p = .604, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.002$. This provided evidence that the independent variable (Gender) explained approximately 5.2% of the variance in the anxiety dependent variable and only accounted for 0.2% of the variance in the avoid dependent variable.

Romantic relationship attitudes: Family structure and gender differences

Figure 1 displays the interaction effects between gender and family structure (IntactvsDivorce) in terms of the anxiety subscale. The ANOVA revealed that there was no significant interaction between gender and individuals from intact families and divorced families concerning the anxiety subscale $F(1, 136) = .356, p = .552$. It was determined that gender does not differently impact anxiety scores in individuals who are from intact families versus individuals who are from divorced families. The bars in **Figure 1** symbolize each subgroup.

Figure 1

The average score on the anxiety subscale for males and females from intact and divorced families

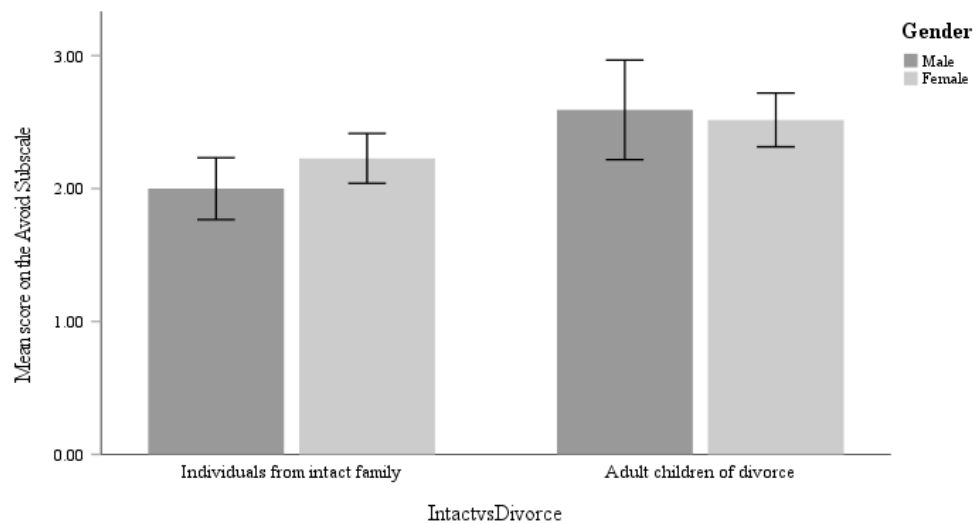


Error Bars: 95% CI

Similarly, **Figure 2** shows that, concerning the avoid subscale, there was no significant interaction between gender and individuals from intact families and divorced families $F(1, 136) = 1.08, p = .302$. Therefore, it was concluded that gender does not differently impact avoidance scores in intact families versus divorced families. The bars in **Figure 2** symbolize each subgroup.

Figure 2

The average score on the avoid subscale for males and females from intact and divorced families



Error Bars: 95% CI

Discussion

This research focused on examining the attitudes of adult children of divorce toward romantic long-term relationships, comparing them to those of individuals from intact families. Furthermore, the study aimed to explore gender differences in these attitudes. This research used anxiety and avoid subscales from the Revised Adult Attachment Scale (Collins, 2008; Teixeira et al., 2019) to analyze attitudes toward romantic long-term relationships. The current research explored three questions, as outlined in the introduction chapter.

Romantic relationship attitudes: Divorced vs. intact families

The current research found that adult children of divorce experience more anxiety and are more avoidant in terms of romantic long-term relationships compared to individuals who come from intact families. The effects were small, yet they were significant. These findings align with results from previous research, which indicated that individuals from divorced

families face more difficulties and barriers concerning romantic relationships compared to individuals from intact families (Anderson, 2014; Braithwaite et al., 2016). Past findings from Cui et al. (2010) revealed that adult children of divorce may feel anxious and reluctant regarding long-term commitments. These findings are in line with the results of the current study, as adult children of divorce scored higher on both the anxiety and avoid subscales.

Romantic relationship attitudes: Gender differences

Furthermore, the present research discovered that females endure greater anxiety in the context of romantic long-term relationships compared to males. These results support the findings from Tosun et al. (2022), who illustrated that females are more prone to have insecure and fearful attachment styles in romantic relationships than males. However, Tosun et al. (2022) found that females were more likely than males to show avoidance in romantic relationships. Contrary to these findings, the results of the current study revealed no significant difference between genders in terms of avoidance in romantic relationships. It would be informative to examine the underlying reasons for the gender difference in anxiety within romantic relationships, as well as the reasons behind the absence of gender differences in avoidance within romantic relationships.

Romantic relationship attitudes: Family structure and gender differences

When examining the third and final research question, the results showed that there was no relationship between gender and individuals from intact and divorced families regarding anxiety and avoidance in romantic relationships. It can, therefore, be assumed that gender does not have varying effects on anxiety and avoidance scores in individuals who come from intact families versus individuals who come from divorced families. These findings do not align with previous research since Jacquet et al. (2001) discovered that females from divorced parents endured more anxiety in romantic relationships compared to males from divorced parents. Moreover, the current study's findings do not coincide with the

results of Lee's (2019) study, which displayed that females were affected by their parents' divorce in connection to their own romantic relationships, whereas males were not.

Strengths

This study had its strong points. One of the primary strengths of this research was the participation of Icelandic individuals in the sample. As stated in the introduction chapter, based on current knowledge, more research is needed on this topic with Icelandic samples. Hence, it is crucial to delve more deeply into this subject with Icelandic participants in mind. Furthermore, another strength was the reliability of the subscales, anxiety and avoid, which was substantial, indicating that the items within the subscales measured the same underlying construct. Another strong point of this study was that it was easily accessible and quick to execute; participants took no longer than 5 minutes to complete the online survey.

Limitations and suggestion for future research

As with any study, this research had its limitations. One notable limitation was the gender ratio. There were far more female participants than male participants. As referenced earlier, studies on this topic often face challenges with an imbalanced gender ratio. It would have been more appropriate to have a balanced gender distribution, as one of the primary aims of this study was to examine gender differences. Future research should concentrate on reaching a more stable gender ratio. Another factor that acted as a limitation in the current study was the dropout rate and incomplete responses. Many participants had to be excluded from the dataset since they either did not answer vital questions or discontinued the study after only answering a few questions.

Moreover, incorporating more questions regarding attitudes toward romantic relationships could have heightened the informative value of the study. To clarify, future research could explore further factors beyond anxiety and avoidance in romantic relationships. In addition, for future research, it would be intriguing to explore whether

various types of divorces have differing effects on the attitudes of adult children of divorce toward romantic relationships. In essence, is there a significant difference between the effects of an intense parental divorce and a gentle parental divorce on adult children of divorce? In addition, how can these effects be diminished? Are certain interventions more beneficial compared to others?

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current study's findings provide further evidence that family structure can shape individuals from a young age (Wasserman, 2020). As highlighted earlier, adult children of divorce often experience a range of adverse effects following their parents' divorce (Anderson, 2014; Braithwaite et al., 2016). These effects can linger into their adulthood and have unfavorable impacts on various areas of their lives, including those related to romantic relationships (Amato, 2010; Amato & James, 2010; Cui & Fincham, 2010; Cui et al., 2010; Miralles et al., 2023; Smith-Etxeberria et al., 2022). This past research is consistent with the findings of the current study, which revealed that adult children of divorce hold more unfavorable attitudes and feelings toward romantic relationships compared to individuals from intact families. Therefore, parents must be more aware of how their divorce and actions can influence their children's attitudes and views regarding many factors, such as romantic relationships. The outcomes of this research and past studies clearly state that it is essential for parents to look at the bigger picture when they go through a divorce.

References

- Amato, P. R. (2010). Research on Divorce: Continuing Trends and New Developments. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(3), 650-666. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00723.x>
- Amato, P. R. & James, S. L. (2010). Divorce in Europe and the United States: Commonalities and differences across nations. *Family Science*, 1(1), 2-13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19424620903381583>
- Anderson, J. (2014). The Impact of Family Structure on the Health of Children: Effects of Divorce. *The Linacre Quarterly*, 81(4), 378-387. <https://doi.org/10.1179/0024363914Z.00000000087>
- Braithwaite, S. R., Doxey, R. A., Dowdle, K. K. & Fincham, F. D. (2016). The Unique Influences of Parental Divorce and Parental Conflict on Emerging Adults in Romantic Relationships. *Journal of Adult Development*, 23(4), 214-225. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10804-016-9237-6>
- Cui, M. & Fincham, F. D. (2010). The differential effects of parental divorce and marital conflict on young adult romantic relationships. *Personal Relationships*, 17(3), 331-334. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6811.2010.01279.x>
- Cui, M., Fincham, F. D. & Durtschi, J. A. (2010). The effect of parental divorce on young adults' romantic relationship dissolution: What makes a difference? *Personal Relationships*, 18(3), 410-426. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6811.2010.01306.x>
- Jacquet, S. E. & Surra, C. A. (2001). Parental divorce and premarital couples: Commitment and other relationship characteristics. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63(3), 627-638. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2001.00627.x>

- Lee, S. A. (2019). Romantic Relationships in Young Adulthood: Parental Divorce, Parent child Relationships during Adolescence, and Gender. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 28(2), 411-423. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-018-1284-0>
- Miralles, P., Godoy, C. & Hidalgo, M. D. (2023). Long-term emotional consequences of parental alienation exposure in children of divorced parents: A systematic review. *Current Psychology*, 42(14), 12055-12069. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-02537-2>
- Pronzato, C. & Aassve, A. (2019). Parental breakup and children's development: the role of time and of post-separation conditions. *Review of Economics of the Household*, 17(1), 67-87. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11150-017-9396-7>
- Smith-Etxeberria, K., Corres-Medrano, I. & Fernandez-Villanueva, I. (2022). Parental Divorce Process and Post-Divorce Parental Behaviors and Strategies: Examining Emerging Adult Children's Attachment-Related Anxiety and Avoidance. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(16), 10383. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph191610383>
- Stevenson, B. & Wolfers, J. (2007). Marriage and Divorce: Changes and their Driving Forces. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 21(2), 27-52. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.21.2.27>
- Tosun, C., Yildirim, M., Altun, F. & Yazıcı, H. (2022). Personality Traits and Attachments Styles in Romantic Relationships Deciding. *Journal of Family Issues*, 43(5), 1219-1234. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X211022383>
- Teixeira, R. C. R., Ferreira, J. H. B. P. & Howat-Rodrigues, A. B. C. (2019). Collins and Read Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS) validity evidences. *Psico*, 50(2), 29567. <https://doi.org/10.15448/1980-8623.2019.2.29567>

Collins, N. (2008). Adult Attachment Scale [Word document]. UC Santa Barbara. Retrieved from

https://labs.psych.ucsb.edu/collins/nancy/UCSB_Close_Relationships_Lab/Resources_files/Adult%20Attachment%20Scale.doc

Wasserman, M. (2020). The Disparate Effects of Family Structure. *The Future of Children*, 30(1), 55-82.

Appendix A

Appendix A

Descriptive statistics of the sample by family structure, parental marriage status, age at parental divorce, and parents' relationship before, during, and after the separation

Variables	N	%
Family structure		
Parents in cohabitation	87	49.4
Parents never in cohabitation	10	5.7
Parents are not in cohabitation	72	40.9
Other	7	4.0
Parental marriage status		
Yes	55	69.6
No	24	30.4
Participants' age at parental divorce		
0-5 years old	12	21.8
5-10 years old	9	16.4
10-15 years old	21	38.2
15-20 years old	8	14.5
20+	3	5.5
Does not apply	2	3.6
Parental relationship before separation		
Positive and loving	23	29.1
Negative and non-loving	34	43.0
Neutral	22	27.8
Parental relationship during separation		
Stable, understanding, and loving	24	30.8
Unstable, not understanding, and disrespectful	51	65.4
Neutral	3	3.8
Parental relationship after separation		
Positive and loving	23	29.5
Negative and non-loving	35	44.9
Neutral	20	25.6

Appendix B

The Revised Adult Attachment Scale

The original set of items from the Revised Adult Attachment Scale is listed in the order they were displayed to the respondents. The overview includes the complete list of items, while **Table 2** shows only the items that performed well in the factor analysis.

Veljið stig á milli 1 til 5 þar sem 1 táknar "Alls ekki einkennandi fyrir mig" og 5 táknar "Mjög einkennandi fyrir mig"

1 = Alls ekki einkennandi fyrir mig	2 = Ekki einkennandi fyrir mig	3 = Hlutlaust	4 = Einkennandi fyrir mig	5 = Mjög einkennandi fyrir mig
--	--------------------------------------	------------------	---------------------------------	--------------------------------------

Mér finnst tiltölulega
auðvelt að verða
náin/náinn/náið öðru
Fólki

Mér finnst erfitt að
leyfa mér að treysta á
aðra

Ég hef oft áhyggjur af
því að rómantískir
félagar elski mig ekki í
raun og veru

Mér finnst að aðrir séu
óviljugir til að nálgast
mig eins mikið og ég
myndi vilja

Mér líður vel að treysta
á aðra

Ég hef oft áhyggjur af
því að rómantískir
félagar elski mig ekki í
raun og veru

Mér finnst að aðrir séu
óviljugir til að nálgast
mig eins mikið og ég
myndi vilja

Mér líður vel að treysta
á aðra

Ég er ekki
hrædd/hræddur/hrætt
við að fólk komist of
nálægt mér

Mér finnst að fólk sé
aldrei til staðar þegar
ég þarf á þeim að halda

Mér líður nokkuð
ópægilega þegar ég er
náin/náinn/náið öðrum

Ég er oft með áhyggjur
af því að rómantískir
félagar vilji ekki vera
með mér

Þegar ég tjái
tilfinningar mínar til
annarra er ég
hrædd/hræddur/hrætt
um að þeim muni ekki
líða eins gagnvart mér

Ég spyr mig oft hvort
rómantískir félagar
þykja í raun og veru
vænt um mig

Mér líður vel með að
þróa nán sambönd við
aðra

Mér líður óþægilega
þegar einhver verður of
tilfinningalega nán
mér

Ég veit að fólk mun
vera til staðar þegar ég
þarfnast þeirra

Ég vil verða
nán/náinn/náið öðru
fólki en ég er
hrædd/hræddur/hrætt
um að verða
særð/særður/sært