

Family Education and Healthy Romantic Relationships: Maternal Rejection and Emotional Dependence

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ABSTRACT

Early adulthood represents a critical stage in personal development, particularly in forming high-quality romantic relationships. The quality of such relationships is shaped not solely by partner interactions but also by early parenting experiences and individual emotional states. This study investigated the impact of parental rejection and emotional dependence on the quality of romantic relationships among early adult women. It employed a quantitative correlational design and sampled 231 early adult women through purposive sampling. Data were collected using an online questionnaire and were analyzed through multiple linear regression. The results revealed that parental rejection and emotional dependence jointly had a significant effect on romantic relationship quality ($F = 56.948$; $p < 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.333$). Individually, emotional dependence exerted a significant positive influence ($\beta = 0.566$; $p < 0.001$), whereas parental rejection was not a significant predictor ($\beta = 0.034$; $p = 0.549$). These findings suggested that the quality of romantic relationships was more strongly influenced by individuals' emotional states than by direct parental experiences. Consequently, fostering emotional independence was identified as a crucial element in promoting healthy and stable romantic relationships among early adult women.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Early adulthood is widely regarded as a critical transitional phase in human development, during which individuals shift from a caregiving environment toward a context that demands emotional, social, and economic autonomy. Diane E. Papalia classifies adulthood as spanning approximately ages 20 to 40, characterized by the exploration of life direction, consolidation of identity, establishment of career pathways, and the formation of more mature interpersonal relationships [1]. At this stage, individuals increasingly confront life realities independently, organize long-term goals, and assume responsibility for the consequences of their decisions. These developmental changes propel individuals into a more complex interpersonal world, including romantic relationships that extend beyond mere attraction to encompass shared experiences, the development of trust, and the provision of emotional support [2].

Within this developmental trajectory, early adulthood often represents a period in which individuals attain physical and cognitive maturity, enabling more rational decision-making and the negotiation of intimacy, attachment, and commitment within close relationships [3]. Papalia further emphasizes that early adulthood is a stage in which individuals learn to integrate logical reasoning

with emotional experience in resolving interpersonal challenges, including conflicts arising in romantic relationships [4]. Intimate relationships during this period are no longer perceived as transient forms of closeness; rather, they increasingly embody trust, stability, and future-oriented planning. In this sense, romantic relationships in early adulthood function not only as expressions of affection but also as mechanisms for identity formation, meaning-making, and the enhancement of psychological well-being.

This perspective aligns with Erik Erikson's psychosocial developmental framework, which situates early adulthood within the stage of intimacy versus isolation [5]. During this phase, individuals are confronted with the developmental task of forming close, mutually supportive relationships, demonstrating the capacity to embrace vulnerability, and orienting themselves toward relational continuity. Those who successfully achieve intimacy tend to exhibit higher emotional well-being and stronger interpersonal connectedness, whereas failure to attain intimacy may lead to social isolation, feelings of alienation, or difficulties in establishing long-term relationships. Consequently, romantic relationships in early adulthood should not be understood merely as emotional phenomena but as essential developmental needs closely linked to mental health, emotional regulation, and the formation of a more stable identity.

In the context of romantic relationship quality, Robert Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love represents one of the most influential and widely applied theoretical models in the psychology of relationships [6]. Sternberg conceptualizes love as a psychological construct composed of three primary components: intimacy, passion, and commitment. As articulated by Phillip Shaver and Cindy Hazan, intimacy refers to emotional closeness, connectedness, and bonding within a loving relationship; passion denotes the motivational drives associated with romance, physical attraction, and sexual engagement; and commitment reflects the cognitive decision to love another person and to maintain that love over time [7].

The interaction among these three dimensions determines the form of love experienced within a relationship. Intimacy emphasizes emotional warmth, support, psychological closeness, and openness, enabling partners to feel valued and accepted. Sternberg highlights that intimacy is characterized by emotional connectedness, attachment, and relational bonding [6], [8]. Passion relates to affective and sexual drives, emotional energy, and interpersonal attraction, often serving as the initial catalyst for relationship formation. Commitment, by contrast, represents the cognitive pillar that sustains long-term relational stability, reflecting an individual's decision to preserve the relationship [9]. Variations in love emerge from differing intensities and combinations of these three components. Romantic love arises from the presence of intimacy and passion without long-term commitment, whereas companionate love develops from intimacy and commitment in the relative absence of passion. In contrast, relationships characterized solely by passion and commitment without emotional closeness tend to be fragile and superficial. The most ideal form, consummate love, occurs when intimacy, passion, and commitment are present in a balanced and integrated manner.

Romantic love integrates emotional intimacy with physical passion, whereas companionate love is more commonly found in long-term partnerships, where emotional warmth and commitment persist despite a decline in physical passion [10]. Fatuous love is marked by impulsive commitment lacking the foundation of mature emotional intimacy. According to Sternberg, consummate love represents the ideal balance among intimacy, passion, and commitment, offering a comprehensive framework for understanding the quality of romantic relationships, as the equilibrium of these elements determines relational health and long-term stability.

The dynamics of love in early adulthood are not solely shaped by interpersonal interactions within the relationship but are also significantly influenced by early caregiving experiences. Cross-cultural research indicates that experiences of parental acceptance or rejection play a crucial role in shaping attachment patterns that individuals carry into adult romantic relationships [11]. Interpersonal Acceptance-Rejection Theory, developed by Ronald P. Rohner, provides a robust theoretical foundation for understanding the relationship between parenting and psychosocial adjustment [12]. This theory posits that the need for positive emotional responsiveness from significant others, particularly parents, is a universal biological necessity that has evolved throughout human history.

IPAR Theory further explains that parental rejection is consistently perceived across cultures in four primary forms, all situated within the broader dimension of parental warmth [13]. Acceptance is typically expressed through warmth and affection, whereas rejection may manifest as emotional coldness or lack of affection, leading children to feel neglected. Rejection may also take the form of hostility or aggression, as well as indifference that results in unmet emotional needs. Additionally, undifferentiated rejection refers to a child's subjective perception of being unloved or unwanted, even in the absence of explicit rejecting behaviors [14]. Notably, maternal undifferentiated rejection has been found to exert a stronger association with psychological maladjustment compared to paternal rejection. Children who experience such rejection tend to internalize beliefs of unworthiness, emotional insecurity, and a lack of lovability. These internalized schemas form working models that shape how individuals perceive themselves, their partners, and interpersonal relationships in adulthood [15].

Empirical evidence demonstrates that the impact of parental rejection is universal [12]. These experiences are associated with common outcomes, including the internalization of negative emotions, difficulties in emotional regulation, and challenges in forming close interpersonal relationships. Classical research by Hazan and Shaver indicates that insecure attachment in childhood is strongly associated with negative relational experiences in adulthood [7]. These patterns are further supported by research demonstrating that early experiences of emotional rejection influence romantic relationship dynamics in early adulthood [16].

One of the most salient manifestations of maternal rejection is the emergence of emotional dependence in adult romantic relationships. Emotional dependence can be conceptualized as a maladaptive coping mechanism developed to compensate for unmet emotional needs during early caregiving [17]. It is characterized by an excessive need for affection and continuous emotional contact [18]. Individuals exhibiting emotional dependence often prioritize their partners above all else, idealize them, and subordinate their own autonomy to preserve the relationship, even when it becomes psychologically harmful [19].

Emotional dependence is further reinforced through mechanisms of fear, idealization, and interpersonal subordination. Empirical findings indicate that emotional dependence may function as a mediating variable in maladaptive relational dynamics, including the persistence of individuals in abusive relationships influenced by perfectionistic parental expectations [18].

From an educational perspective, the development of healthy romantic relationships in early adulthood cannot be separated from the educational experiences individuals receive throughout their lives, particularly within the family and formal educational settings. Education extends beyond cognitive achievement to include the development of social-emotional competencies, interpersonal communication, empathy, emotional regulation, and responsible decision-making, all of which contribute to individuals' capacity to establish healthy interpersonal relationships [20], [21]. These competencies are increasingly recognized as essential educational outcomes because they prepare young adults to build trust, manage conflict constructively, and maintain psychological well-being throughout adulthood [21].

Family education constitutes the earliest educational environment in which children acquire values, emotional competencies, and interpersonal skills through continuous interactions with parents. Parents serve not only as caregivers but also as primary educators who model affection, communication, trust, emotional responsiveness, and conflict resolution [22], [23]. Positive parenting practices foster emotional security, self-esteem, and adaptive relationship skills, whereas parental rejection may disrupt children's social-emotional development and reduce their capacity to establish secure and satisfying intimate relationships in adulthood [24], [12].

Furthermore, contemporary educational frameworks increasingly emphasize Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) as a core component of lifelong education. According to CASEL, competencies such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making contribute significantly to interpersonal adjustment and psychological well-being [20]. These competencies are directly relevant to romantic relationship quality because they enable emerging adults to regulate emotions, communicate effectively, demonstrate empathy, and maintain healthy commitment within intimate relationships [25], [26].

Emotional dependence is also prevalent among individuals from dysfunctional family backgrounds or those who have experienced parental divorce [27]. Additionally, Indonesian research highlights the influence of paternal attachment on emotional expression, indicating that father-child attachment significantly affects self-disclosure among early adult women in romantic relationships [28].

This study proposes a conceptual model integrating maternal parental rejection, emotional dependence, and romantic relationship quality within a unified analytical framework. Ultimately, this research aims not only to describe the quality of romantic relationships in early adulthood but also to examine the extent to which maternal parental rejection contributes to emotional dependence and how such dependence influences the structure of love as conceptualized through intimacy, passion, and commitment [6].

2. METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach. According to Creswell, quantitative research is utilized to test theories by measuring variables and analyzing the relationships among them using statistical procedures [29]. The study adopted a correlational research design, which aims to examine the relationships between variables without manipulating them. The data were analyzed using multiple linear regression, a statistical model employed to assess the influence of two or more predictor variables on a single dependent variable. Multiple linear regression enables researchers to evaluate both the simultaneous and partial contributions of independent variables to the dependent variable. As noted by Tabachnick and Fidell, this method provides a comprehensive framework for determining the relative contribution of each predictor within a multivariate model [30].

The sampling technique applied in this study was non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling. This technique is employed when researchers establish specific criteria to ensure that participants are aligned with the research objectives. Accordingly, sample selection was based on the researcher's judgment rather than random probability. The population consisted of early adult women aged 20–40 years who have a maternal figure in their lives. A total of 231 participants were included in the study. Participant characteristics were determined based on their relevance to the research variables, particularly their experiences in maternal relationships and romantic involvement.

The instruments used to measure romantic relationship quality, parental rejection, and emotional dependence were adapted from established scales. Romantic relationship quality was assessed using the Romantic Love Scale developed by Z. Rubin [31], consisting of 13 items with nine response options, of which three items were excluded following analysis. Parental rejection was measured using the Adult Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire developed by R. P. Rohner [32], comprising 29 items with four response options, with 12 items subsequently removed. Emotional dependence was measured using the CDE (Emotional Dependency Questionnaire) developed by M. Lemos and N. H. Londoño [33], consisting of 23 items with six response options.

All instruments were adapted from English into Bahasa Indonesia through a systematic translation process conducted by the researcher and subsequently reviewed by three expert psychology lecturers. The review process focused on clarity, terminological accuracy, and cultural appropriateness, resulting in a valid final version of the instruments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Prior to the main study, the instruments underwent a pilot test involving 30 early adult women. Item validity was evaluated using a discrimination index threshold of ≥ 0.20 , indicating that all retained items met the criteria for validity and were deemed appropriate for use in the study.

Table 1. The reliability and item Discrimination Index of Research Instruments.

Instrument	n	Reliability	Discrimination Index
Romantic Relationship	60	0.884	0.46 - 0.90
Parental Rejection	60	0.934	0.37 – 0.65
Emotional Dependence	60	0.938	0.48 – 0.83

Source: Spss (v.25)

All data were collected online through the Google Forms platform and underwent a data cleaning process prior to analysis. Statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 25. This study employed a predictive correlational design and utilized multiple linear regression analysis to examine the relationships among variables and to determine the extent to which predictor variables contribute to the outcome variable.

This section presents the results of data analysis aimed at examining the effects of maternal parental rejection and emotional dependence on the quality of romantic relationships in early adulthood. The analysis was conducted using multiple linear regression to determine the contribution of each independent variable, both simultaneously and partially, in predicting the dependent variable. In addition, classical assumption tests were performed to ensure the adequacy and robustness of the regression model employed in this study.

Table 2. The Demographic Data of Research Sample

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Ethnicity		
Jawa	125	54.1%
Sunda	45	19.5%
Bugis	12	5.2%
Melayu	11	4.8%
Others	38	16.5%
Age		
20-21	101	43.7%
22-23	100	43.3%
24-25	14	6.1%
26-27	9	3.9%
≥ 28	7	3.9%
Relationship status		
In Relationship	209	90.5%
Engaged	11	4.8%
Married	11	4.8.0%
Current Domicile		
Rented room (Kost)	68	29.4%
Living with parents	153	66.2%
Living with spouse	10	4.3%

Source: Spss (v.25)

This study was conducted among 231 early adult women. The analyzed demographic data are presented in Table 2 above.

Table 3. Demographic of Participants

	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
Ethnicity	231	3.37	2.895	1	10
Age	231	22.23	2.770	19	48
Relationship status	231	1.14	.468	1	3
Domicile	231	1.75	.525	1	3
Romantic relationship	231	57.56	13.297	21	90
Parental rejection	231	31.57	11.130	17	68
Emotional dependence	231	79.93	23.549	25	133

Source: Spss (v.25)

Based on the results of descriptive statistical analysis presented in Table 3, the romantic relationship variable has a mean score of 57.56 ($SD = 13.297$), parental rejection has a mean of 31.57 ($SD = 11.130$), and emotional dependence has a mean of 79.93 ($SD = 23.549$). The range of minimum and maximum scores across these variables indicates considerable variability among participants, suggesting a heterogeneous distribution of respondent characteristics within this study.

Assumption Test

The classical assumption tests conducted in this study include tests of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity.

Table 4. Results of the Normality Test

Test	Statistic	Df	p
Kolmogorov-Smirnov	0.046	.231	.200

Source: Spss (v.25)

The results of the normality test using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov method indicate a significance value of 0.200 ($p > 0.05$), suggesting that the residual data are normally distributed, as presented in Table 4 above.

Table 5. Results of the Multicollinearity Test

Predictor	Tolerance	VIF
Parental Rejection	0.914	1.094
Emotional Dependence	0.914	1.094

Source: Spss (v.25)

The multicollinearity test presented in Table 5 indicates that the tolerance values for both predictor variables are 0.914 (> 0.10) and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values are 1.094 (< 10). These results suggest that there is no evidence of multicollinearity in the regression model.

Table 6. Results of the Heteroscedasticity Test

Predictor	SE	β	t	P
Constant	1.810	-	4.687	< .001
Parental Rejection	0.042	0.146	2.141	.033
Emotional Dependence	0.020	0.126	-1.850	.066

Source: Spss (v.25)

The results of the heteroscedasticity analysis indicate that the parental rejection variable has a significance value of 0.033 ($p < 0.05$), while emotional dependence has a significance value of 0.066 ($p > 0.05$). However, visual inspection through a scatterplot of standardized residuals against standardized predicted values shows that the data points are randomly dispersed and do not form a specific pattern. Therefore, the regression model does not indicate the presence of heteroscedasticity.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 7. Results of Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Prediktor	B	SE	β
Konstanta	30.720	2.897	-
<i>Parental Rejection</i>	.041	.068	.034
<i>Emotional Dependence</i>	.320	.032	.566

Source: Spss (v.25)

Table 8. Results of the t-test (Partial Effects)

Model	F	Sig.
Regresi	56.948	.000

Source: Spss (v.25)

Table 9. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

R	R2	Adjusted R2
.577 ^a	.333	.327

Source: Spss (v.25)

The results of the multiple linear regression analysis indicate that the regression model is statistically significant ($F = 56.948$; $p < 0.001$). Thus, the hypothesis stating that parental rejection and emotional dependence simultaneously influence romantic relationship quality is supported. The correlation coefficient (R) of 0.577 suggests a moderate relationship, while the coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.333 indicates that 33.3% of the variance in romantic relationship quality is explained by these two variables.

At the partial level, emotional dependence demonstrates a significant effect on romantic relationship quality ($\beta = 0.566$; $t = 10.014$; $p < 0.001$), supporting the hypothesis that emotional dependence influences romantic relationships. The positive direction of the relationship indicates that higher levels of emotional dependence are associated with higher levels of romantic relationship scores.

In contrast, parental rejection does not show a significant effect on romantic relationship quality ($\beta = 0.034$; $t = 0.600$; $p = 0.549$), leading to the rejection of the hypothesis proposing a direct influence of parental rejection on romantic relationships.

The findings of this study demonstrate how maternal parental rejection and emotional dependence contribute to shaping the quality of romantic relationships among early adult women. The regression analysis revealed that the model was simultaneously significant, indicating that both variables jointly contribute to explaining the variance in romantic relationship quality. These empirical results suggest that romantic relationship dynamics in early adulthood are influenced by the interplay between past caregiving experiences and individuals' current psychological conditions.

At the partial level, the results indicate that emotional dependence is a significant predictor of romantic relationship quality, whereas parental rejection does not exhibit a direct effect. This finding implies that present psychological factors play a more dominant role than past experiences in determining the quality of romantic relationships.

High levels of emotional dependence were identified as a significant predictor of romantic relationship quality. Individuals with this characteristic tend to rely on their partners as the primary source for fulfilling affective needs and regulating emotions. This finding is consistent with prior research indicating that individuals with insecure attachment are more likely to exhibit elevated emotional dependence in romantic relationships [34]. Furthermore, other studies suggest that romantic relationship dynamics in early adulthood are strongly influenced by attachment patterns and individuals' emotional needs within interpersonal contexts [35].

Elevated emotional dependence is also associated with fear of loss and excessive needs for closeness, which can negatively affect relationship quality. Empirical evidence shows that individuals with high emotional dependence often encounter difficulties in establishing stable relationships due to relational anxiety and heightened needs for validation [36]. Thus, emotional

dependence emerges as a critical factor in shaping how individuals develop and maintain romantic relationships.

Conversely, the absence of a direct effect of parental rejection on romantic relationship quality indicates that experiences of maternal rejection do not directly determine romantic outcomes in early adulthood. This finding aligns with studies suggesting that early caregiving experiences influence adult relationships indirectly through other psychological variables, such as attachment patterns and interpersonal perceptions [37].

Accordingly, parental rejection in this study can be understood as a background factor that contributes to the formation of individuals' psychological conditions but does not directly predict romantic relationship quality. Other research similarly indicates that experiences of parental neglect or rejection are associated with difficulties in developing intimacy and maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships in early adulthood [38].

These findings point to the likelihood of indirect mechanisms underlying the relationships among variables, whereby maternal rejection contributes to the development of excessive emotional needs, which in turn influence romantic relationship quality. This pattern reinforces the notion that the relationship between past experiences and adult romantic functioning is complex and mediated by psychological factors.

The focus on early adult women is based on the consideration that women tend to exhibit higher emotional involvement in interpersonal relationships and greater sensitivity to relational dynamics. This is supported by research indicating that early adult women are more vulnerable to emotional dependence and relational anxiety compared to men [39].

The theoretical implications of this study suggest that romantic relationship quality is more strongly influenced by individuals' current emotional conditions than by past caregiving experiences alone. These findings underscore the importance of internal psychological factors in shaping interpersonal relationship dynamics, particularly during early adulthood.

From a practical perspective, the results imply that psychological interventions should not focus solely on past experiences but also emphasize the development of emotional autonomy, emotion regulation, and more adaptive relational patterns. Such approaches are essential in helping individuals establish healthier and more stable romantic relationships.

This study has several limitations, including the use of a correlational design that precludes causal inference, as well as the restriction of the sample to early adult women. Future research is therefore recommended to test this model in more diverse populations, including male participants, and to examine more explicitly the mediating role of psychological variables in the relationship between parental rejection and romantic relationship quality.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that maternal parental rejection and emotional dependence simultaneously contribute to the quality of romantic relationships among early adult women. However, further analysis reveals that emotional dependence functions as a more dominant and statistically significant predictor at the partial level, whereas parental rejection does not exhibit a meaningful direct effect on romantic relationship quality. These findings strongly indicate that individuals' internal emotional conditions, particularly the level of emotional dependence, play a more decisive role in shaping the quality of romantic relationships during early adulthood. Accordingly, higher levels of emotional dependence are associated with a greater tendency for individuals to form and maintain intense emotional involvement within their romantic relationships.

The formation of romantic relationship dynamics in early adulthood constitutes a multifaceted phenomenon shaped not only by past experiences but also by how individuals regulate and fulfill their emotional needs within relational contexts. Although parental rejection serves as an important latent factor contributing to individuals' psychological landscape, it does not directly predict romantic relationship quality. Therefore, fostering emotional autonomy emerges as a critical foundation for developing stable, healthy, and resilient romantic relationships among early adult women, enabling them to engage in intimate relationships in a more adaptive and self-directed manner.

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