

# Study on The Impact of Family Environment and Childhood Experiences on The Social Behavior of Only Children

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## Abstract

**The family environment with parental education as the core has a huge impact on the ability of only children to integrate into society. Based on narcissism theory, social learning mechanism and attachment theory, this study uses correlation analysis, regression analysis and interview data analysis methods to explore how the family's attention to only children affects their social interactions as they grow up. , social behavior and dependence on partners.**

## Keywords

**Children Growth growth, family, mental health.**

## 1. Research Background

To explore the meaning of mental health, we must first start with the definition of mental health. Mental health includes two meanings: first, no mental illness, which is the most basic condition for mental health. Mental illness includes various psychological and behavioral abnormalities; second, having a positive psychological state, that is, being able to maintain one's own health. Mental health, proactively reducing problem behaviors and addressing psychological distress. The Third International Conference on Mental Hygiene in 1946 pointed out that mental health refers to: "Being in perfect harmony with one's body, intelligence, and emotions; being able to adapt to the environment and being humble to each other in interpersonal interactions; having a sense of happiness; and being able to give full play to one's abilities in work and career. Ability to live an efficient life."

"The Concise Encyclopedia Britannica" explains mental health as: "The best state that an individual's psychology can achieve within the scope of its own and environmental conditions, but it is not a perfect and absolute state."

Chinese researcher WANG Shuquan believes that mental health refers to a relatively stable and long-lasting psychological functional state of a person. It is when an individual interacts with the social environment, mainly manifested in whether he can maintain a balanced mentality in interpersonal interactions, maintain a stable state of emotions, needs, and cognition, and show a relatively stable true self. Personality traits. She believes that if mental health could be defined in one simple word, it would be "harmony." Individuals not only feel good about themselves, develop in harmony with society, and exert their best psychological performance, but they are also able to practice self-care and consciously reduce behavioral problems and mental illnesses. Judging from various literatures, the definitions of mental health obtained from different perspectives are also different, and a unified conclusion cannot be reached. But its meaning can be understood as the impact of mental health on people. Simply put, it can be seen from work and study.

In terms of study and work, suffering from mental illness will inevitably have an impact on life. Some mental illnesses can have an impact on physical health, such as insomnia. Prolonged sleep deprivation can lead to a decline in physical function, which can lead to other diseases. Common diseases such as depression and bipolar disorder can affect communication with others, make

it impossible to work normally, and even make it impossible to find a job. Even if they find a job, few people are willing to communicate with mentally unhealthy people, and some people discriminate against or even dislike mentally unhealthy people. Therefore, people with unhealthy mental health are most vulnerable to malice from the surrounding environment, which is not good for themselves. They cannot regulate their emotions and remain in an unstable state for a long time, which is also a kind of pressure for themselves. In terms of study and life, teenagers express their goodwill and malice very directly. Under the influence of the mental health of those around them and their own, it is very difficult to study hard and get good grades, let alone those with dyslexia. Some basic abilities are not working.

For family and friends, mentally unhealthy people will cause stress to their family and friends. For example, if there is a person in the family who is very emotionally unstable and often loses his temper, it will make the whole family a mess and affect the work status of the parents. , the child's personality will also be affected and become irritable. The family will suffer from negative emotions for a long time and will not be able to have a healthy life. Over time, the family will fall apart.

What's more, mental health has great benefits for people themselves. People can stabilize their emotions, express their emotions, communicate with others normally, promote mutual understanding, and make people more harmonious. In study and work, mental health means that a person's state is positive, so he is more confident, bravely faces challenges, and achieves success. For families, mental health enables people to give each other a sense of happiness and support each other, and the family will be more united. Mental health is closely related to physical health. Keeping your mood happy can also keep you in the best physical condition and avoid various physical diseases.

## 2. Research Review

YANG Ling, CAO Hua et al.(2017) studied the childhood trauma, coping styles and Internet addiction of college students in "The Relationship between Childhood Trauma and Internet Addiction among College Students: The Mediating Role of Coping Style" The relationship between. According to surveys, psychological abuse or neglect in childhood has become a common phenomenon, and nearly half of college students have suffered psychological abuse or neglect. Childhood trauma is positively correlated with Internet addiction among college students. During the two periods, coping style plays a mediating role. Positive coping style is significantly negatively correlated with Internet addiction; while negative coping style is significantly positively correlated with Internet addiction. It is concluded that childhood trauma directly affects college students' Internet addiction, and coping styles indirectly affect college students' Internet addiction.

LU Qin (2010) mentioned in "The Impact of Family Factors on the Mental Health of College Students" that seven family background factors, namely childhood trauma, left-behind experience, family economy, family structure, family atmosphere, parenting style and whether they are an only child, have an impact on mental health. The influence is significantly related. College students with family backgrounds such as non-only children who have left-behind experience, financial difficulties, sojourn, single-parent families, domestic disharmony, punishment or excessive interference and protection of college students have lower mental health levels. Among them, family structure is related to three factors: interpersonal sensitivity, depression, and psychosis. Finally, the authors recommend incorporating family factors into mental health education.

ZHOU Kai (2011) stated in "Research on the Relationship between Mental Health, Psychological Resilience and Subjective Well-Being of Middle School Students with Childhood Left-behind Experience" that the mental health and subjective well-being levels of middle school students

with childhood left-behind experience are significantly lower than those of middle school students without left-behind experience. Among the research subjects, the mental health of high school students is significantly lower than that of junior high school students, because high school students are more self-focused and physically mature, making high school students with left-behind experience more sensitive to their own body and mind. Specifically, the lower the degree of mental health, the less positive emotions and more negative emotions you experience, so the lower your life satisfaction and the lower your subjective well-being. Psychological flexibility plays a mediating role between middle school students' mental health and subjective well-being. Psychological resilience refers to the ability to "overcome difficulties" and cope with the negative effects of stress and to recover quickly after encountering traumatic events. The higher the personal elasticity and health, the more positive emotions and less negative emotions are experienced, thus the higher the life satisfaction and the higher the level of subjective well-being.

Based on five Internet articles retrieved using the keywords of childhood trauma, experience and mental health, through social network and semantic network analysis, it can be concluded that: first, the central vocabulary is "childhood", "influence", "development", "family" The words environment "child" and "research". The relationship between childhood trauma, experience and mental health can be seen from the word "influence", with the former affecting the latter. "Development" describes a process, which the author believes refers to the process from childhood to mental health or unhealthy. "Family" and "environment" are closely related to childhood. A person's childhood is experienced under the guidance of the family, which is also the impact of the environment on mental health, and the family is part of the environment. The word "child" is the main character of childhood and is the object of study in all the articles. There are also words like "psychology", "behavior", "self", "society", "growth" and "period". "Behavior" and "self" are all contents of "psychology". Five articles were mentioned in the analysis, indicating that they are more closely related to this aspect. "Growth" corresponds to the previous development process, which means that the results of childhood experiences are gradually reflected in growth. "Period" means a stage in time. Childhood is a stage in time, and so is growth. "Society" may mean that the results and effects of mental health are manifested in a large group such as society.

### 3. Theoretical Analysis and Hypothesis

#### 3.1. Narcissism Theory

The term "narcissism" originates from Western literary works, directly translated into Chinese as Narcissus. This comes from a poignant ancient Greek myth: the beautiful youth Narcissus saw his reflection in the water and fell in love with himself. Neglecting food and drink, he wasted away and died, transforming into a flower known as Narcissus. Psychiatrists and clinical psychologists borrowed this term to describe a phenomenon where a person falls in love with oneself. Everyone has a certain degree of narcissistic tendencies, varying in intensity. Around 3 years of age, children begin to develop the concept of "self." After birth, infants are primarily cared for by close family members, especially the mother, who breastfeeds, the father who pats gently, and sings lullabies. By meeting their physiological needs and experiencing warmth and nurturing from interactions, like eye contact with the mother, children gradually comprehend "affection" and "love." Even though children are unaware of their identity initially, due to the mother's good care, they gradually grasp a sense of "affection" and "love." As psychological development progresses, children differentiate between themselves and their mother, continuing to attach to the mother while internally feeling, "My mother loves me, so I am lovable," even when the mother is not present.

The feeling of "I am cute" transformed from the reality of "mother loves her child" constitutes the initial "narcissism" emotion in people's hearts. Throughout the entire process of childhood growth, mothers buy clothes that children like to wear, buy toys that children enjoy, play with children by their side, and children can always experience the feeling of "I am cute", especially in single-child families, where a child can experience the feeling of being showered with all-encompassing love. Because of the attention from those around us, we also become more self-absorbed, nurturing the feeling of "narcissism". During adolescence, due to physical development, there is also a gradual process of psychological separation from parents, and our living environment is no longer always under the watchful eyes of parents and relatives. We begin to develop curiosity and interest in the opposite sex. When one sees someone of the opposite sex who shares similarities in appearance or personality, it creates a similar sense of attention as that from family members. For example, a girl who likes painting may develop a liking for a boy who is good at painting. Similarly, a boy who enjoys playing table tennis may develop an interest in a girl who plays table tennis well, thus further nurturing positive feelings. This shared experience or similarity with the other person projects the feeling of "I am cute" onto them.

Based on this, Hypothesis 1 is proposed in this study: Children from single-child families, due to receiving more attention, will pay attention to similarities with themselves when making friends with strangers after experiencing separation from their families.

The independent variables include family structure, family attention (academic performance, physical health, career aspirations, daily needs), and separation from the family. The dependent variable is "paying attention to similarities with oneself when interacting with strangers".

### 3.2. Social Learning Theory

Alport and Bandura are the founders of social learning theory, which emphasizes how learning occurs in social contexts. The core idea of this theory is that individuals acquire new behaviors by observing others, known as observational learning. The social learning theory suggests that learning behavior can be categorized into learning from consequences of actions and learning from demonstration processes. It focuses on the latter, also known as observational learning. Observational learning entails individuals observing, imitating, and learning from others' behaviors. Bandura further breaks down observational learning into four processes: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. Not all observable behaviors can be effectively learned, as individuals may not be able to imitate and learn certain behaviors due to specific circumstances.

Based on this, Hypothesis 2 of this study proposes that children observe and learn behavioral norms from their parents and family members during their upbringing, leading to similarities in behavior habits with family members in adulthood. The independent variables are family structure and behavioral norms, while the dependent variable is "similarities in behavior habits with family members in adulthood."

### 3.3. Attachment theory

Attachment theory is a psychological, evolutionary, and ethical theory about relationships between people. The main idea of attachment theory is that infants need to develop a relationship with at least one primary caregiver to enable normal social and emotional development. This theory was proposed by psychiatrist and psychoanalyst John Bowlby. In attachment theory, infant behaviors related to attachment mainly involve seeking proximity to the attachment figure in stressful situations. Attachment theory divides the relationship between infants and caregivers into four stages: pre-attachment phase, attachment-in-the-making phase, clear-cut attachment phase, and reciprocal relationships.

Attachment theory categorizes attachment into three developmental types. Secure attachment refers to children becoming securely attached when the mother is responsive and meets the child's needs appropriately. Anxious-resistant attachment occurs when the mother tries hard but sometimes overlooks the child's needs until completing other tasks, sometimes focusing more on the parents' needs than the child's active requests. The last type is anxious-avoidant attachment. Children of this type often do not have their needs met consistently, leading them to believe that expressing their needs to the mother does not affect her.

Based on this, Hypothesis 3 is proposed in this study: People who received excessive attention during childhood are more likely to develop a sense of dependency on family members, friends, or partners.

The independent variables are family structure, family attention (academic performance, physical health, career aspirations, daily life), and the dependent variable is "developing a sense of dependency on family members, friends, or partners".

## 4. Questionnaire Survey

### 4.1. Family and growth experience 's effect on socialization

**Table 1. Correlation Analysis1**

Terms	average value	(statistics) standard deviation	Does your family care about your academic performance?	How much does your family care about your health?	Does your family support you in choosing your favourite career?	How much does your family care about your life?	How similar is your friend's personality to yours?
Does your family care about your academic performance?	3.90	1.25	1				
How much does your family care about your health?	3.81	1.24	0.72**	1			
Does your family support you in choosing your favourite career?	3.77	1.38	0.72**	0.71**	1		
How much does your family care about your life?	3.75	1.22	0.71**	0.70**	0.65**	1	
How similar is your friend's personality to yours	3.78	1.30	0.74**	0.65**	0.70**	0.73**	1
* p<0.05 ** p<0.01							

Assuming that children who are only children receive more attention, when they separate from their families and make friends with strangers, they pay attention to similarities between themselves and the other person. According to the correlation analysis, the concern from family members for academic performance, physical health, and support in life shows significant correlations with the similarity in friends' personalities, similar hobbies, and similar habits, with correlation coefficients ranging between 0.75 and 0.65, and a p-value of less than 0.01.

This means that these variables are correlated and influence each other. Thus, it also proves the hypothesis that the family of only children pays more attention to them, reflected in the level of concern for their academic, personal, and professional lives, thereby affecting the only child's focus on finding friends who share similar characteristics, which is also evident in their personality, interests, and habits. The positive correlation of these variables confirms the initial assumption.

**Table 2. Correlation Analysis2**

Terms	average value	(statistics) standard deviation	The extent to which your friends share your habits	Does your family care about your academic performance?	How much does your family care about your health?	Does your family support you in choosing your favourite career?	How much does your family care about your life?
The extent to which your friends share your habits	3.79	1.23	1				
Does your family care about your academic performance?	3.90	1.25	0.76**	1			
How much does your family care about your health?	3.81	1.24	0.74**	0.72**	1		
Does your family support you in choosing your favourite career?	3.77	1.38	0.73**	0.72**	0.71**	1	
How much does your family care about your life?	3.75	1.22	0.73**	0.71**	0.70**	0.65**	1
* p<0.05 ** p<0.01							

Assuming that in a single-child family, due to receiving more attention, after experiencing separation from the family, one will pay attention to the similarities between oneself and unfamiliar friends when making friends.

According to the relevancy analysis, there is a significant correlation between the concern from family members regarding academic performance, physical health, life, and support for career, and the similarity in friends' personalities, hobbies, and habits, with correlation coefficients between 0.75 and 0.65, and a p-value less than 0.01. This means that these variables are correlated and influence each other. Thus, it proves the hypothesis that the family of an only child pays more attention, reflected in the degree of concern for academic life and work, thereby affecting the only child's focus on people with similar characteristics when making friends, also reflected in the similarity of personality, hobbies, and habits. The positive correlation of these variables confirms hypothesis one.

## 4.2. Family and upbringing experiences have an impact on behavior habits

**Table 3. Regression Analysis1**

Terms	regression coefficient	t-value	p-value	VIF
a constant (math.)	0.24	0.90	0.373	-
Does your family care about your academic performance?	0.37	3.68	0.000**	2.90
How much does your family care about your health?	0.14	1.45	0.149	2.73
Does your family support you in choosing your favourite career?	0.21	2.45	0.016*	2.54
How much does your family care about your life?	0.20	2.13	0.036*	2.45
sample size	106			
R <sup>2</sup>	0.664			
Adjustment R <sup>2</sup>	0.651			
F	F(4,101)=49.872, p=0.000			
* p<0.05 ** p<0.01				

**Table 4. Regression Analysis2**

Terms	regression coefficient	t-value	p-value	VIF
a constant (math.)	0.13	0.50	0.621	-
Does your family care about your academic performance?	0.07	0.66	0.510	2.90
How much does your family care about your health?	0.30	3.03	0.003**	2.73
Does your family support you in choosing your favourite career?	0.23	2.71	0.008**	2.54
How much does your family care about your life?	0.35	3.71	0.000**	2.45
sample size	106			
R <sup>2</sup>	0.672			
Adjustment R <sup>2</sup>	0.659			
F	F(4,101)=51.779,p=0.000			
* p<0.05 ** p<0.01				

Hypothesis 2 assumes that children observe and learn behavioral norms from their parents and family members during their growth process, leading to behavioral habits in adulthood that are more similar to those of their family. According to the graph, regression analysis depicts the relationship between family's concerns regarding academic performance, physical health, life, and support in career, and the similarity in children's and family members' personalities and hobbies. The R-squared values range from 0.664 to 0.672, indicating that 67% of the data can explain the similarity in children's and family members' personalities, and 66% of the data can explain the similarity in children's and family members' hobbies. This to some extent proves Hypothesis 2.

### 4.3. Family and growth experience’s effect on dependence

**Table 5. Correlation Analysis3**

Terms	average value	(statistics) standard deviation	Does your family care about your academic performance?	How much does your family care about your health?	How much does your family care about your life?	How often you miss your family	The number of times you communicate with your family (including online)
Does your family care about your academic performance?	3.90	1.25	1				
How much does your family care about your health?	3.81	1.24	0.72**	1			
How much does your family care about your life?	3.75	1.22	0.71**	0.70**	1		
How often you miss your family	2.17	1.02	0.13	0.06	-0.00	1	
The number of times you communicate with your family (including online)	2.42	1.31	-0.12	-0.04	-0.01	-0.10	1
* p<0.05 ** p<0.01							

**Table 6. Correlation Analysis4**

Terms	average value	(statistics) standard deviation	Number of times you communicate with friends (including online)	The number of times you see your friends	How much does your family care about your health?	Does your family support you in choosing your favourite career?	How much does your family care about your life?
Number of times you communicate with friends (including online)	2.24	1.02	1				
The number of times you see your friends	2.44	1.20	0.02	1			
How much does your family care about your health?	3.81	1.24	0.01	-0.07	1		
Does your family support you in choosing your favourite career?	3.77	1.38	-0.06	-0.05	0.71**	1	
How much does your family care about your life?	3.75	1.22	0.05	-0.08	0.70**	0.65**	1
* p<0.05 ** p<0.01							



**Table 7. Correlation Analysis5**

Terms	average value	(statistics) standard deviation	How often do you see your boyfriend/girlfriend or partner?	How often do you chat with your boyfriend/girlfriend or partner?	Does your family care about your academic performance?	How much does your family care about your health?	How much does your family care about your life?
How often do you see your boyfriend/girlfriend or partner?	3.72	2.05	1				
How often do you chat with your boyfriend/girlfriend or partner?	3.13	1.37	0.68**	1			
Does your family care about your academic performance?	3.90	1.25	-0.75**	-0.63**	1		
How much does your family care about your health?	3.81	1.24	-0.67**	-0.57**	0.72**	1	
How much does your family care about your life?	3.75	1.22	-0.71**	-0.59**	0.71**	0.70**	1
* p<0.05 ** p<0.01							

Hypothesis 3 in family and upbringing experiences suggests that individuals who received excessive attention during childhood are more likely to develop feelings of dependence on family members, friends, or partners. According to the analysis, factors indicating attention include family concern for academic performance, physical health, and general well-being, as well as support for career choices. There was no significant correlation found between dependence on friends, family, and partners. Dependency on friends was reflected in the frequency of communication with them, showing no significant correlation, indicating that these two variables do not influence each other. Dependency on family members was shown through the frequency of communication with them, with no correlation or influence between the two variables. However, data on dependence on partners revealed a significant negative correlation, suggesting that the more attention received during childhood, the less dependence on partners in adulthood. As receiving attention and care from family in childhood satisfies psychological needs, individuals may not form dependencies on family, friends, and partners in adulthood. Conversely, if attention was lacking during childhood, leading to unmet psychological needs, individuals may seek fulfillment from family, friends, and partners in adulthood, desiring attention and care and thus feeling dependent. These data have not proven Hypothesis 3.

## 5. Original Maternal Concern and Individualization Separation

### 5.1. The Relationship between Original Maternal Concern and Child's Healthy Development

The original maternal concern is a mother's instinctual response to the child. For example, when a child cries, it may be a signal that she is hungry, so the mother breastfeeds her. This also signifies the interaction of the infant with the world, where the mother's high adaptability and timely responses to the child are crucial. If the mother does not respond promptly to the child's interactions, leaving her feeling neglected, the child may experience loneliness, which can affect their physical and mental health. However, as time passes after the baby's birth, the mother's adaptability should gradually decrease.

While the mother is unable to respond promptly to the child's interactions, it fosters the child's resilience and tolerance to setbacks. If adaptability decreases too quickly, the child may feel that their needs are not being met promptly, impacting their personality development. On the other hand, if adaptability decreases too slowly, the child's ability to adapt to their environment and fundamental skills like speaking may require more time to learn. Therefore, appropriate original maternal concern has an impact on the child's abilities and healthy development.

### 5.2. The mental problems during the stage of individuation and separation

During the stage of individuation and separation, which typically occurs during adolescence, the child needs to establish some boundaries and separations from the family. The child has independent needs and perceives themselves as a separate, autonomous individual distinct from the parents. However, at the same time, the child still relies on the parents and the family for emotional and life needs. Therefore, the child is in a contradictory stage and requires guidance from the family. It is important for the family to provide the child with some independent space while also offering emotional and partial life support to address the child's dependencies. Inappropriate guidance can lead to family conflicts and impact the child's psychological well-being. For example, some children may excessively immerse themselves in electronic devices, exhibit school aversion, or develop more severe conditions like anxiety disorders. Hence, during the individuation and separation phase, children need proper guidance and support from their families, which also contributes to their future psychological well-being.

## 6. Conclusion

For teenagers, an extremely important adaptability factor is to establish warm and cultured relationships with parents, caregivers, or other adults. Children with positive family relationships are less likely to experience depression, anxiety, and perceived stress in their future lives. Adaptability cannot be simplified as an innate personal attribute, it is a process that children and caregivers need to cultivate strong, positive relationships and meaningful experiences through the resources in their environment.

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