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VALIDATION OF THE ACADEMIC SELF-EFFICACY SCALE (ASES) IN STUDENTS IN ROMANIA

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Abstract

Academic self-efficacy is considered a central determinant of motivation, persistence, and performance in higher education, yet the Romanian literature does not currently include a validated version of the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (ASES) for university students. The present study aimed to translate, culturally adapt, and psychometrically validate the 9-item ASES for use in Romanian, in a sample of 168 students enrolled in economics-related university programs. Participants completed the ASES online, with responses given on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics, evaluation of internal consistency (omega and Cronbach's alpha coefficients), and exploratory factor analysis. The results indicated high levels of self-reported academic self-efficacy without marked floor or ceiling effects, excellent internal consistency ($\omega = 0.936$; $\alpha = 0.936$), and an essentially unidimensional factor structure, with a single general factor explaining 62.4% of the total variance and item loadings ranging from 0.711 to 0.852. These findings suggest that the Romanian version of the ASES is a brief, reliable, and valid instrument for assessing academic self-efficacy among Romanian university students, suitable for use both in research and in educational and counseling practice.

Keywords: *academic self-efficacy; Academic Self-Efficacy Scale; psychometric validation; university students; higher education.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Academic self-efficacy is defined in the literature as students' judgment of their ability to successfully accomplish academic tasks and cope with university demands (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001). It derives from Bandura's general concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982) and is considered a central determinant of motivation, persistence, and performance in educational contexts (Bandura et al., 1996). Longitudinal studies conducted with first-year university students have shown that higher levels of academic self-efficacy are associated with better academic outcomes, more effective adjustment to university life, lower levels of stress, and greater satisfaction with the study experience.

In higher education, academic self-efficacy does not refer only to a global sense of confidence in one's abilities but also encompasses specific competences such as planning

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study time, using effective learning strategies, taking notes, academic writing and research skills, active participation in classes, and perseverance when facing difficulties. Students who perceive their academic competences as high tend to approach university tasks as manageable challenges, set realistic goals, persist in the face of obstacles, and engage in self-regulated learning behaviours, which contributes to better adjustment and long-term success.

The Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (ASES), developed by Chemers, Hu, and Garcia, is a brief instrument designed to assess students' beliefs about their ability to meet academic demands. The scale includes statements referring to time management, preparation for tests, note-taking, research and writing skills, as well as global perceptions of academic success and interest in academic work. The 9-item version of the ASES used in the present study provides a concise measure of students' confidence in performing a wide range of academic tasks, with each item rated on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

A substantial body of research has highlighted the central role of academic self-efficacy in predicting students' performance and adjustment to university. For example, the classic study by Chemers and colleagues showed that academic self-efficacy and optimism are strongly associated with performance, stress, health, and commitment to persist in studies among first-year students. Subsequent studies have confirmed that academic self-efficacy correlates with engagement in learning activities, the use of self-regulation strategies, and how students approach academic challenges, underscoring the need for valid and reliable instruments to measure this construct.

In recent years, the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale has been adapted and validated in diverse educational and cultural contexts, including among students in Arab countries (Hemade et al., 2025), in China (Zhao et al., 2024), and in European educational systems (Kampmane & Ozola, 2025; Van Zyl et al., 2022), and these studies have generally confirmed the high reliability and essentially unidimensional factor structure of the scale. For example, validation of the Arabic version of the ASES demonstrated high internal consistency coefficients and a stable factor structure, allowing the scale to be used to assess academic self-efficacy and to compare levels across sexes and different student groups. Similarly, validation of the Chinese version of the scale showed a unidimensional factor model, good fit indices, and measurement invariance across gender. The scale has retained its psychometric qualities even in versions with fewer and slightly modified items, without altering the core content (Van Zyl et al., 2022).

In the Romanian literature, the concept of academic self-efficacy appears implicitly in discussions of motivation, self-regulation, and educational success, but there is currently no validated Romanian version of the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale for university students. Nevertheless, the scale has been used in research, including in the Republic of Moldova, even though it has not yet benefited from a formal validation in Romanian. This gap limits the possibility of adequately and systematically assessing students' beliefs about their academic competences and of integrating self-efficacy into counselling programmes, psychoeducational interventions, or longitudinal studies on adjustment to university.

Students in economics-related fields often combine their student status with professional activity, which poses additional challenges in terms of time management, organisation of academic tasks, and perception of their learning competences. In this context, developing and validating a Romanian version of the ASES becomes essential for a rigorous

assessment of academic self-efficacy and for identifying factors that may support or hinder students' educational trajectories.

The present study therefore aims to translate, culturally adapt, and validate the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (ASES) for use in Romanian, in a sample of students enrolled in economics university programmes. The goal is to evaluate the psychometric properties of the Romanian version of the ASES—in terms of internal consistency, factor structure, and metric adequacy—and to provide a brief, reliable, and valid instrument for measuring academic self-efficacy in the Romanian higher education context.

2. OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESES

2.1. OBJECTIVE

The main objective of the present study is to translate, culturally adapt, and psychometrically validate the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (ASES) for use in Romanian among students enrolled in university programmes in the field of economics. Specifically, the study aims to evaluate the psychometric properties of the Romanian version of the ASES—in terms of internal consistency, factor structure, and item stability—and to examine the extent to which the scale provides a reliable and valid estimate of academic self-efficacy in the Romanian university context. By achieving this objective, the research seeks to offer a brief, easy-to-administer instrument, aligned with the original ASES, that can be used both in educational psychology studies and in psychoeducational practice (for example, in academic counselling programmes or in the evaluation of interventions aimed at developing learning competences).

2.2. HYPOTHESES

Considering the results of previous validation studies of the ASES in various cultural contexts, as well as the reported properties of the original version, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

H1. The Romanian version of the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (ASES) will show good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha (and, if computed, omega) coefficients of at least 0.70 for the total scale score, indicating an adequate level of item homogeneity.

H2. Exploratory and/or confirmatory factor analysis will reveal a stable factor structure for the Romanian ASES, compatible with the theoretical model proposed in the original literature (e.g., a general academic self-efficacy factor or a dimensional structure similar to that reported by Chemers, Hu, and Garcia).

H3. The items of the Romanian ASES will exhibit high factor loadings on the general factor (greater than 0.40), and the principal factor will explain a substantial proportion of the total variance (at least 40%), thereby supporting the structural validity of the scale.

H4. The distribution of scores on the Romanian ASES will not show major floor or ceiling effects, and statistics such as skewness and kurtosis will fall within acceptable ranges for the use of factor analyses and linear models, thus supporting the metric adequacy of the scale in the sample of economics students.

3. METHOD

3.1. Participants

The study was conducted on a convenience sample of 168 students enrolled in university programmes in the field of economics. Participants were recruited via an online questionnaire distributed through the Google Forms platform, and participation was voluntary and conditional upon providing informed consent. Data collection took place in May 2026.

The research design was quantitative, cross-sectional, and non-experimental, with the primary aim of psychometrically validating the Romanian version of the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (ASES) among economics students.

Inclusion criteria were being a student in an economics-related university programme, being at least 18 years of age, and providing informed consent to participate. Incomplete responses and individuals who did not meet the criterion of belonging to the economics field were excluded from the analyses.

Participants' ages ranged from 20 to 55 years ($M = 29.38$; $SD = 7.86$), indicating the presence of both students at the beginning of their university studies and adults who pursued higher education alongside professional activity. Regarding gender distribution, the sample was relatively balanced, comprising 87 women (51.8%) and 81 men (48.2%). The distribution of participants by gender is presented in Table 1.

In terms of professional status, most participants reported combining academic studies with employment ($n = 136$; 81.0%). A total of 25 participants (14.9%) indicated that they were exclusively students, whereas 7 participants (4.2%) reported being students engaged in independent activities such as freelancing or entrepreneurship. The distribution of participants by professional status is shown in Table 2.

Table 1. Distribution of participants by gender

Gen	N	%
Female	87	51,8
Male	81	48,2
Total	168	100,0

Table 2. Distribution of participants by professional status

Professional status	N	%
Student only	25	14,9
Student and employee	136	81,0
Student and freelancer/entrepreneur	7	4,2
Total	168	100,0

3.2. Instruments

Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (ASES) – original version

The Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (ASES) is a brief instrument developed to assess students' perceptions of their own academic competence. The scale has been used in longitudinal and cross-cultural studies on student adjustment and is considered an important indicator of academic motivation, engagement, and achievement.

In the present study, we used the 9-item version of the ASES. Each item is phrased as a statement referring to specific academic competences, such as planning study time, taking notes, preparing for tests, research and writing skills, global self-evaluation of academic performance, and interest in university work. Participants rated each statement on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), and the total scale score was obtained by summing the items, with higher scores indicating higher levels of academic self-efficacy.

The items used in the Romanian version are conceptually equivalent to those in the international 9-item version and cover the main domains of academic self-efficacy: time management (“I know how to schedule my time to accomplish my tasks”), note-taking (“I know how to take notes”), study strategies (“I know how to study to get good results on tests”), research and writing skills (“I am good at research and writing papers”), global self-evaluation of the student role (“I am a very good student”), perceived success on academic tasks (“I usually do very well in college and on academic tasks”), understanding academic requirements (“I understand the academic tasks and assignments I have”), interest in academic work (“I find my academic work interesting”), and general belief in one’s ability to succeed (“I am very capable of succeeding in my academic activities”). Table 3 presents the items of the original ASES, and their Romanian equivalents used in the present study.

Table 3. Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (ASES) items - original version and Romanian version (RO)

No.	Item (original, English)	Item (Romanian version)
1	I know how to schedule my time to accomplish my tasks.	Știu cum să-mi programez timpul pentru a-mi îndeplini sarcinile.
2	I know how to take notes.	Știu cum să iau notițe eficiente.
3	I know how to study to get good results on tests.	Știu cum să studiez pentru a obține rezultate bune la evaluări.
4	I am good at research and writing papers.	Sunt competent/ă în activități de cercetare și redactare de lucrări academice.
5	I am a very good student.	Sunt un/o student/ă cu performanțe foarte bune.
6	I usually do very well in college and on academic tasks.	De obicei, am rezultate foarte bune în mediul universitar și în îndeplinirea sarcinilor academice.
7	I understand the academic tasks and assignments I have.	Înțeleg cerințele sarcinilor și activităților academice care îmi revin.
8	I find my academic work interesting.	Consider activitatea mea academică interesantă.
9	I am very capable of succeeding in my academic activities.	Sunt foarte capabil/ă să am succes în activitățile mele academice.

Romanian version of the ASES

The Romanian version used in the present study corresponds to the 9-item form of the ASES, which has recently been validated in other cultural contexts (e.g., Arabic, Chinese), where the scale has demonstrated an essentially unidimensional factor structure and very high reliability. The translation–back-translation procedure and content validation aimed to

maintain the semantic and conceptual equivalence of these 9 items so that the Romanian version would faithfully reflect the domains of academic self-efficacy described in the international literature.

For the adaptation of the ASES into Romanian, we used the standard translation–back-translation procedure recommended in recent validation studies of the scale in other languages (e.g., Arabic and Chinese). In the first stage, two independent translators with experience in educational psychology and advanced proficiency in English translated the ASES items into Romanian. In the second stage, a consensual version was obtained by comparing and harmonising the two translations, with particular attention to semantic equivalence and clarity of wording for students.

Subsequently, an independent translator with expertise in English performed a backtranslation of the Romanian version into English, and this version was compared with the original items to verify that the original meaning had been preserved. Any significant discrepancies were discussed and adjusted by an expert panel (university lecturers in psychology and economics), so that the final version would be both semantically and culturally appropriate for Romanian students in economics programmes.

Before large-scale use, the Romanian version of the ASES was piloted on a small group of students ($N = 16$) to check item comprehensibility and completion time. Participants' feedback focused on the clarity of wording and any difficulties in understanding; on the basis of these observations, minor language adjustments were made without altering the conceptual content of the items.

In the present study, the Romanian ASES was administered online, with items presented in a fixed order, and the instructions reproduced, in Romanian, the guidelines from the original version regarding the response scale and how to rate each statement.

3.3. Procedure and statistical analyses

Statistical analyses were conducted using JASP software (version 0.18). Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, skewness, kurtosis, minimum and maximum values) were calculated for each ASES-Romanian item to examine score distributions and potential floor or ceiling effects. Internal consistency of the scale was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and omega coefficients, with 95% confidence intervals.

The factor structure of the Romanian ASES was examined through exploratory factor analysis, employing principal axis factoring and oblique promax rotation. Factor retention was based on eigenvalues greater than 1 and inspection of the scree plot, and interpretation considered both the proportion of variance explained by the principal factor and the magnitude of item loadings, with a threshold of at least 0.40.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Descriptive statistics for ASES items

Descriptive statistics for the items of the Romanian version of the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (ASES) are presented in Table 4. Mean scores range between approximately 5 and 6 on the 7-point Likert scale (1–7), indicating, overall, a moderate to high level of self-reported academic self-efficacy among participants. Standard deviations, which lie between

about 1.4 and 1.6, suggest an adequate variability of responses, without extreme concentration of scores at specific points on the scale.

Analysis of skewness and kurtosis did not reveal extreme values for any of the items; response distributions fall within ranges considered acceptable for the use of factor analyses and linear models. These results support hypothesis H4, indicating that the distribution of scores on the Romanian ASES does not exhibit major floor or ceiling effects and that skewness and kurtosis values are within acceptable limits for factorial analyses and linear modelling.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for ASES items (RO)

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Std. Error of Skewness	Kurtosis	Std. Error of Kurtosis	Min	Max
ASES_01	5.256	1.616	-0.673	0.187	-0.236	0.373	1	7
ASES_02	5.375	1.577	-0.75	0.187	-0.289	0.373	1	7
ASES_03	5.381	1.472	-0.83	0.187	0.314	0.373	1	7
ASES_04	4.804	1.556	-0.256	0.187	-0.655	0.373	1	7
ASES_05	4.78	1.518	-0.338	0.187	-0.277	0.373	1	7
ASES_06	4.958	1.549	-0.478	0.187	-0.402	0.373	1	7
ASES_07	5.375	1.569	-0.8	0.187	-0.233	0.373	1	7
ASES_08	5.131	1.603	-0.684	0.187	-0.306	0.373	1	7
ASES_09	5.518	1.41	-0.757	0.187	-0.013	0.373	1	7

4.2. Internal consistency of ASES-Romanian version

The Romanian version of the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (ASES) showed excellent internal consistency. The omega coefficient for the total scale score, calculated across the 9 items, was 0.936 (SE = 0.007, 95% CI [0.921, 0.950]), indicating a very high level of composite reliability. Cronbach's alpha coefficient had the same value, $\alpha = 0.936$ (SE = 0.009, 95% CI [0.918, 0.955]), far exceeding the threshold of 0.70 commonly considered minimally acceptable for research use and falling within the range reported in previous validation studies of the 9-item ASES.

Table 2. Internal consistency of the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (ASES) - RO

Scale	N items	Coefficient	Estimate	Std. Error	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
ASES total	9	ω	0.936	0.007	0.921	0.950
ASES total	9	α	0.936	0.009	0.918	0.955

These results support hypothesis H1 regarding the excellent internal consistency of the Romanian version of the ASES. The items of the scale form a homogeneous set that reliably measures a general factor of academic self-efficacy in economics students. The high

values of ω and α , together with the narrow confidence intervals, indicate the stability of reliability estimates and provide additional support for the use of the Romanian ASES in future studies and in educational practice.

4.3. Factor structure of ASES-Romanian version

4.3.1. Eigenvalue and explained variance

Table 3. Eigenvalue and explained variance of the general factor (ASES-RO)

Solution	Factor	Eigenvalue	Proportion of variance	Cumulative
Unrotated solution	1	5.618	0.624	0.624
Promax rotated	1	5.618	0.624	0.624

To examine the factor structure of the Romanian version of the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (ASES), an exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the 9 items of the scale. The results indicated a predominantly unidimensional factor model. The single principal component had an eigenvalue of 5.618 and explained 62.4% of the total variance in responses, both in the unrotated solution and in the promax-rotated solution, whereas any additional component had an eigenvalue below the threshold of 1.

The high proportion of variance explained by the general factor suggests that most of the common variance among the ASES-Romanian items is attributable to a single construct of academic self-efficacy, consistent with the theoretical model and with findings from international studies on the 9-item version of the scale. These results confirm hypothesis H2, indicating a unidimensional and stable factor structure for the Romanian ASES, compatible with the theoretical model proposed by Chemers, Hu, and Garcia and with international validations of the 9-item version.

4.3.2. Factor loadings and uniqueness

Table 4. Factor loadings of ASES items on the general academic self-efficacy factor (RO)

Item	Factor 1 loading	Uniqueness
ASES_06	0.852	0.274
ASES_05	0.837	0.300
ASES_09	0.833	0.306
ASES_07	0.822	0.324
ASES_08	0.780	0.391
ASES_03	0.771	0.406
ASES_02	0.770	0.407
ASES_01	0.722	0.479
ASES_04	0.711	0.494

Note. Applied rotation method is promax.

The factor loadings of the items on the general academic self-efficacy factor are presented in Table 7. All nine items showed high loadings, with values ranging from 0.711 (ASES_04) to 0.852 (ASES_06), exceeding the commonly used threshold of 0.40 for a substantial contribution to the factor. Items referring to general perceptions of academic success and being a “very good student” (ASES_05, ASES_06, ASES_09, ASES_07) had the

highest loadings (0.822–0.852), suggesting that they capture the core of academic self-efficacy beliefs.

Items referring to specific competences, such as planning study time, taking notes, preparing for tests, and research and writing skills (ASES_01, ASES_02, ASES_03, ASES_04), also showed high loadings (0.711–0.771), indicating that these abilities are integrated into the same global construct of academic self-efficacy. Uniqueness values, ranging from 0.274 to 0.494, show that a substantial proportion of the variance in each item is explained by the general factor, supporting the notion of essential unidimensionality of the scale.

Taken together with the reliability results ($\omega = 0.936$; $\alpha = 0.936$), these high factor loadings and the proportion of variance explained by the general factor support hypothesis H2, indicating that the Romanian version of the ASES exhibits a unidimensional, stable factor structure that is compatible with the theoretical model reported in international studies on the 9-item version. The high loadings and the pattern of uniqueness values also support hypothesis H3, suggesting that each item contributes meaningfully to the general academic self-efficacy factor.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The present study aimed to translate, culturally adapt, and psychometrically validate the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale (ASES) for use in Romanian among students enrolled in university programmes in the field of economics. The results indicated that the Romanian version of the ASES exhibits very good psychometric properties: high internal consistency ($\omega = 0.936$; $\alpha = 0.936$, with narrow confidence intervals) and an essentially unidimensional factor structure, with a single general factor explaining 62.4% of the total variance and factor loadings ranging from 0.711 to 0.852 for all nine items.

These findings are consistent with international validation studies of the 9-item ASES, which have likewise reported very high reliability, a unidimensional factor structure, and good model fit indices. Overall, the data support the conclusion that the Romanian version of the ASES is a brief, homogeneous, and robust instrument for assessing academic self-efficacy in Romanian university students, suitable for use both in research and for integration into counselling programmes and psychoeducational interventions aimed at developing learning competences.

At the same time, several limitations of the study should be noted. The sample was a convenience sample and included only students from economics programmes, which restricts the generalisability of the results to other university programmes or to the broader student population. The cross-sectional design does not allow examination of the temporal stability of scores on the Romanian ASES, and the absence of objective measures of academic performance limits the assessment of criterion validity. Future studies are needed to test measurement invariance across gender, field of study, and programme level (bachelor versus master), to evaluate test–retest reliability, and to investigate relationships between the Romanian ASES and external indicators such as academic performance, stress, and adjustment to university.

Despite these limitations, the findings provide strong support for the use of the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale in Romanian as a reference instrument for assessing academic self-efficacy beliefs in university students. The Romanian version of the ASES can contribute to the development of educational psychology research in Romania and can inform academic counselling practices by helping identify students who may benefit from interventions aimed at strengthening self-efficacy and self-regulation in the learning process.

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THE EVOLUTION OF THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE. LEGAL REFLECTIONS, SOCIAL PHENOMENA AND METAMORPHOSES OF INDIVIDUAL PERCEPTION

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Abstract

The present study addresses a topical and interdisciplinary topic (couple psychology and family law), investigating how contemporary social phenomena shape young people's perceptions, attitudes and beliefs regarding the institution of marriage. The research design is quasi-experimental, with a sample of 57 participants ($m = 22.46$). In the initial phase a battery of questionnaires (Marital Intention Scale, Marital Expectations Scale, Marital Attitude Scale, Relationship Beliefs Inventory, Romantic Beliefs Scale) and a semi-structured interview were applied. Descriptive data revealed strong heterogeneity regarding the ideal age for marriage (with an average of years and a major concentration at the 25-year threshold) and high scores on indicators of romantic idealism. However, the baseline data also revealed a deficit of legal knowledge and a worrying presence of legislative myths, with young people evaluating the reflection of these themes in society as being totally "insufficiently addressed". Starting from the needs of young people, an intervention was carried out, and the post-intervention results confirmed the efficiency of the applied program.

Keywords: *intention to marry, age, gender, parental models, legal knowledge about marriage*

1. INTRODUCTION

Over time, marriage has undergone several transformations depending on the socio-economic development contexts of the world but also on the role it played in society. Thus, patterns of marriage specific to time periods are noteworthy. We note here two of the theorists in the field, namely Stanger-Ross, Collins & Stern (2005) and Cherlin (2004). Stanger-Ross et al. (2005) identify three distinct periods determinate by household membership of the family of origin: reciprocity (1900-1950), dependence (1950-1970) and autonomy (1970-2000). Dependence on the family of origin influenced the decision to marry in the sense that being

less autonomous in relation to the family and often sharing the living space with it, it was necessary to consider all the implications of this cohabitation. As the years passed, around the middle of the 20th century, young people began to marry later and thus their degree of autonomy was greater, as a result their decision was less influenced by their family of origin. Cherlin (2004) also delimits a period in terms of the. Traditions and significance. Of marriage, and thus, we have at the beginning of the 20th century, institutionalized marriage was the predominant model, then it was replaced by companionship and then by individualized marriage. In the first category, love ties are secondary, marriage being an institution with a clearly delimited role. Young people find satisfaction in this union and in fulfilling the roles of husband and wife, and in the third, young people find fulfilment more in developing their personality and career than in developing their family. This last change overlaps with the 1960s, with many revolutions in different parts of the world, revolutions that brought about major changes in the socio-economic dynamics, and changes in political regimes (over 32 states gain their independence), with the liberalization of women with the sexual revolution, etc. all with a major impact on changes in the world so implicitly also regarding the institution of marriage.

If a few decades ago the institution of marriage was considered essential for structuring adult life, today various new forms of relationships offer couples alternatives for experiencing sexual and emotional intimacy outside of marriage (Treas, Lui & Gubernskaya, 2014). With these changes came differences in what people valued in life and relationships, and in whether they chose to start a family. These to the system currently to different forms of marriage but also to the excessive valorisation of celibacy or even the development of niche areas regarding. These notions such as for example those who are part of the „incel” category (involuntary celibate) (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>). A major change comes with liberalization, namely cohabitation before marriage, which leads to a first „fluidization” of this institution (Thornton, Axinn & Xie, 2010). Changes in marriage have also led to changes in attitudes towards marriage, and thus the shift has been made from finding fulfilment in marriage to not. Necessarily having to be married to be fulfilled in your life. It also seen from this association that the transition from being together in marriage to being not necessarily together and even o rather alone has been achieved. All of this being centred on individualism, on personal good, on the valorisation of independence. (Kawamura, 2011; Yoon, Lim & Kim, 2022; Lee, Brzozowska. & Sobotka, 2024). Some of the influences of these changes have also led to changes in other areas, not just to socio-human ones. An example in this sense is given by the change of law in terms of support and providing support in adult relationships in terms of families, a change that took place in Canada and was brought about by a report called “Beyond Conjuality” which sought to clarify the terms of marriage (changed over time due to many changes and imprecise definitions in the law) (Polikoff, 2003). Returning to the changes in the socio-human field, we find that with the fluidization oof marriage and a decrease in the birth rate. A possible explanation for this is the age of marriage, which has changed from young to increasingly older ages, from marriages performed very early at 14, 15 years old in the past to marriages performed after 30 years old today (Abdurahman, Assefa & Berhane, 2022).

1. Family of origin and the socialization process

Attitudes, intentions to marry, and desires to have children are deeply anchored in socialization within the family of origin, with childhood experiences providing the foundation for marital beliefs and expectations (Ganong et al., 1981). Interaction patterns are directly influenced by or through parental observation, although the dynamics of the formation of the merit view are complex, being also influenced by education, gender roles, media, and one's own romantic relationships (Babarskiene & Gajduk, 2018).

Through socialization, individuals internalize the group's culture, the mechanism ensuring both human development and social continuity (Gecas, 2001; Putney & Bengtson, 2002). If behavioural psychology associate socialization with learning patterns through modelling and reinforcement from the sociological environment, they define it as an internalization of roles and statutes (Gecas, 2001). Thus, values and mentalities transmitted generationally ensure the alignment of individual behavior with community norms (Sandu, 2014).

As the main agent, the family facilitates the child's social integration by transmitting skills and roles. However, socialization is continuous throughout life and joining new groups imposes socialization (Putney & Bengtson, 2022; Sandu, 2014).

Primary socialization and its dimensions

Primary socialization carried out in childhood within the family is crucial for physical and emotional development, having a strong affective and cognitive charge (Crisogen, 2016). At this stage, communicative experience develops — from nonverbal to articulated language —, parental messages reflecting the social environment of origin. Moral socialization is still occurring (through the system of rewards and punishments that define approved) and gender socialization (Sandu, 2014).

Gender socialization begins early, with children becoming aware of their gender identity around the age of 3 (Stockard, 2006). In this context, the distinction between sex (anatomical and reproductive characteristics) and gender (a social construct expressed along a continuum of masculinity and femininity) is essential (Kretchmar, 2011). This process is guided by gender norms that regulate what is considered appropriate behaviour and by gender stereotypes, understood as binary, preconceived beliefs that reinforce these norms (John et al., 2017).

Secondary socialization and experiential learning

Secondary socialization begins in preadolescence and continues into adulthood, marking the individual's interaction with media external to the family such as educational and professional institutions. Characterized by emotional neutrality, this allows the internalization of norms specific to our acquired statues and roles (Crisogen, 2016; Sandu, 2014).

In addition to socialization, your mother's beliefs are shaped experientially through previous relationships (Frazier & Esterly, 1990). The experiential learning. Theory proposed by David Kilb (1984) under the influence of Dewey, Lewi and Piaget, approaches the holistic process, highlighting the interaction between cognition, environment and emotions. Kolb describes a cycle consisting of two modes of understanding (abstract conceptualization and concrete experience) and two modes of transforming experience (active experimentation and reflective observation), where concrete experience underpins reflection and new concepts.

Experiential learning starts from the ability to derive from the efficient processing of concrete experiences, aiming to optimize interpersonal communication and decision-making skills (Sanders & Yanouzas, 1985). For example, premarital courses based on this model provide young people with a deep understanding of couple dynamics, preparing them to choose compatible partners and effectively manage relationship challenges (Nielsen et al., 2004).

2. Social phenomena that influence the perception of marriage

Narcissistic and individualistic tendencies in relationships

Interpersonal relationships are deeply influenced by cultural norms (individualistic or collectivist) to which individuals are exposed, modernizing their self-perception as independent or interdependent (Lin et al., 2017). Individualism promotes a vision of the self-separate from others, accepting autonomy, the uniqueness of individual rights, and personal fulfillment (Grossmann & Santos, 2020; Lin et al., 2017). In an individualistic culture, relationships tend to be maintained with foresight when the benefits outweigh the costs (Humphrey & Bliuc, 2021). Although it offers freedom of action and mobility, excessive social centrality can negatively affect interpersonal connections (Ogihara & Uchida, 2014). In the Romanian space, research indicates that it is intermediate but closer to the individualist one (Chelcea et al., 2000).

This cultural orientation. Has favoured the emergence of a “narcissistic epidemic” in Western societies (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Narcissism involves an unrealistically positive self-image, egocentrism, and a sense of entitlement (Campbell & Foster, 2011). In romantic terms, narcissistic people have difficulty connecting deeply, viewing partners as tools to validate their own image and being attracted to high social status. Their relationships are often superficial, marked by playful love oxide, low commitment, fidelity, and high divorce rates (Altınok & Kılıç, 2020).

Gender equality requirements

Gender is a cross-cutting and dynamic sociocultural variable that determines the expectations, roles, rights and responsibilities attributed to men and women in each context (Gianesini, 2014). Gender equality is a socio-political ideal that seeks to guarantee equal opportunities and balanced partnership in the family and society without biological sex dictating and individual's path (UNICEF, 2017). In recent decades, the massive insertion of women into the labour market has declined the traditional model of the man as the sole financial supporter but has generated role conflicts for women who continue to manage most domestic tasks. Attitudes towards gender roles vary from traditional (which prioritizes the domestic role of women) to equalize (who support equal involvement in work and family), fully influencing nuptiality (Hu et al., 2021). On the one hand, traditional specialization of tasks has historically been associated with greater marital stability. On the other hand, modern views change the dynamics of couple formation: egalitarian women are less willing to leave their parental home just to get married and want fewer children, while egalitarian men are more likely to want marriage and children and have a lower risk of divorce. At the same time, your orientations increase the likelihood of cohabitation (Kaufman, 2000).

Although some studies show that equal decision-making and men's involvement in household chores increase the quality of marriage (Amato et al., 2003), to research nuances this aspect by suggesting that marital happiness depends strictly on the woman's perception

of the fairness of the division of tasks; women tend to be more critical in this aspect, reporting lower levels of satisfaction (Oláh & Gähler, 2014).

Very romantic and unrealistic ideals about marriage

Romantic ideals can manifest as unique, highly personalized perceptions of the ideal partner (Markey & Markey, 2007), or as a collective set of idealized credits about the absolute power of love (Sprecher & Metts, 1989). This second model is structured around four fundamental themes: love ignores flaws, there is a perfect partner, love appears instantly and can overcome any obstacle (Sprecher & Metts, 1999).

According to media cultivation theory, schools and churches reinforce these ideal images (passion, perfect communication, love at first sight), often creating unrealistic expectations compared to the reality of marriage (Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Segrin & Nabi, 2002). While some research claims that maintaining these ideals has a positive and protective impact on relationships (Montgomery, 2005; Sprecher & Metts, 1989, 1999), sometimes suggests that unrealistic standards become rigid and harmful in the long run (Fletcher et al., 1999).

Increased tolerance towards cohabitation and sexual experiences outside of marriage

Although marriage remains an important institution, its meaning has been profoundly redefined with the social acceptance of premarital sex, cohabitation, and the birth of children outside the legal framework (Trask & Koivunen, 2007). The evolution of cohabitation has gone through three stages: loudspeaker (probation period before marriage), permanence (normative alternative to marriage) and family arrangement (assuming the functions of procreation and raising children without a legal act) (Kasearu & Kutsar, 2011).

Most adults yearn for cohabitation to prove compatibility, achieve intimacy without formal obligations, or avoid the risk of divorce (Larson, 2001). However, over marital cohabitation is statistically correlated with. An increased risk of subsequent dissolution of the marriage. People who choose cohabitation often exhibit a lower commitment to the institution of marriage, a greater tolerance for divorce, and a pronounced emphasis on individualism (Teachman, 2003). Sexual permissiveness is closely linked to marital projections: career-focused men tend to be more sexually permissive, unlike those who prioritize marriage (Carroll et al., 2007; Carroll et al., 2009). Frequent sexual activity leads young people to consider cohabitation as a criterion for eligibility for marriage (Edin et al., 2003), while people with strongly pro-marriage attitudes reject the idea of cohabitation in the absence of concrete wedding plans (Willoughby & Carroll, 2012).

Legal reflection of the transformations in the institution of marriage

The changes in perception brought about by individualization and the demands of gender equality find a direct reflection in the evolution of the legislative framework of family law. The transition from the patriarchal to the egalitarian model was legally enshrined in national legislation through the Civil Code, which establishes full equality of rights for spouses, patrimonial independence through the possibility of choosing the regime of separation of property (matrimonial convention) and complete freedom in choosing one's profession or place of residence (Codul Civil, Art. 308-312; Almășan, 2013). This legislative openness towards autonomy meets the adventurist tendencies in contemporary society, but it also generates tension between legally protected individualism and the obligation of solidarity, moral support

and contribution to the expenses of marriage imposed by the norm (Reghini, Diaconescu & Vasilescu, 2013).

On the other hand, although increased social tolerance towards cohabitation has transformed cohabitation into a normative reality (Kasearu & Kutsar, 2011), The Romanian legal system maintains a rigid distinction, refusing to assimilate consensual union with legal marriage and depriving cohabitants of the specific protection of inheritance rights. Or community of property (Avram, 2016). This asymmetry between psychosocial reality and the rigidity of the legal norm demonstrates that, while highly romantic or unrealistic ideals tend to ignore legal formalism, ignorance of the law in the premarital phase exposes individuals to major vulnerabilities in the event of the dissolution of the relationship (Florian, 2011).

2. OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

Attitudes and expectations about relationships are important factors in personal relationships. Beliefs and myths related to marriage, deeply rooted in the social and individual psyche, can affect beliefs about relationships and subsequent behaviours, such as marriage decisions and patterns of behaviour within the relationship.

2.1. OBJECTIVE

O1: Assessment of attitudes, expectations and dysfunctional beliefs regarding marriage among unmarried students, correlated with analysis of marital status and their parents' relationship (through semi-structured interview).

O2: Analysis of the impact of socio-demographic factors (sexual, environment, ideal age) and the parental model (status, relationships) on students 'vision of marriage and couple relationships.

O3: Implementing and evaluating a long-term intervention on the legal aspects of marriage and its influence on young people's beliefs.

2.2. HYPOTHESES

I1: It is assumed that young people's opinion on the ideal age for marriage influences marital attitudes represented by marriage intention, expectations from marriage, dysfunctional beliefs about relationships and the romantic implications of relationships.

I2: It is assumed that there are significant differences based on young people's gender and background in terms of marital attitudes represented by marriage intention, expectations from marriage, dysfunctional beliefs about relationships, and romantic implications of relationships.

I3: Youth participation in the intervention program on legal aspects of the family leads to a significant reduction in dysfunctional beliefs and myths about marriage.

3. METHOD

3.1. SAMPLE AND DESIGN

The participants in the study were selected from multiple universities in the western part of our country, aged between 20 and 32 years ($m = 22.46$). Participants voluntarily chose to participate following an advertisement for study enrolment. They were informed about the research, stages, utility and confidentiality of the data obtained. The categories of participants were students with unmarried marital status at the undergraduate level, in various specializations 24 people (39,3%) in psychology 21 people (34,4%) in social work, 9 people (14,8%) in educational sciences and in the engineering field there are 3 people (4,9%). The total number of subjects participating in the study is 57. Initially, 65 individuals expressed interest in participating in the study; however, over the course of the research, some withdrew for personal reasons. From the perspective of the subjects' gender, these are 50 women and 7 men. Also, the subjects are from both urban and rural areas, namely 34 from urban areas and 23 from rural areas. All participants were informed that the survey information was completely confidential and that they would only be identified by their subject number to maintain anonymity. The evaluation was done online, via email and electronic messaging applications.

Research design: a mixed-methods study (quantitative-qualitative), incorporating a quasi-experimental, comparative, and correlational approach, with a pre-test/post-test legal-educational intervention design.

3.2. INSTRUMENTS USED IN THE STUDY

Data about the sample were collected through a questionnaire consisting of: a form with socio-demographic data (which captured the basic characteristics of each respondent: age, gender, marital status, the environment of origin, level of education, the study program followed and the marital status of the parents), A semi-structured interview through which we investigated the quality of the respondents' parental relationship and their opinion regarding the perceived ideal age for marriage. In addition to these, the following evidence was involved:

The IMS Marriage Intention Scale and the AMS Marriage Expectations Scale (Park & Rosen, 2013). These chairs are two of the three steps that make up the Marital Scales, tool developed by Park & Rosen, that it began to be applied to a sample of the population, which includes people of any age, ethnicity, gender or marital status. Responses to items refer to the degree of agreement or disagreement on a 7-point Liker scale, where 0 represents total disagreement and 6 represents total agreement. The marriage intention scale consists of 3 items, one of which is inverted, and measures a person. intentions to marry in the future. The sum of the scores is between 0 and 18. Higher scores indicate a person's more positive intention to marry. The Marriage Intention Scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency, with a coefficient Alpha Cronbach $\alpha = 0.91$, and Construct validity. The Marriage Expectations Scale consists of 23 items, 4 of which are reversed and measure a person's expectations regarding certain aspects of marriage. The sum of the scores is between 0 and 138. Higher scores indicate more positive expectations for the importance of six factors or categories given in marriage

and relationships: romance, respect, trust, finances, meaning, and physical intimacy. (Park & Rosen, 2013). The Marriage Expectations Scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency, with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of $\alpha = 0.92$, and Construct validity.

Mas Marital Attitudes Scale (Braaten & Rosén, 1998) measures both the attitudes and opinions of married and unmarried people towards marriage. It comprises 23 statements to which respondents are asked to rate their degree of agreement or disagreement on a four-point Likert scale, where 0 represents total agreement and 3 represents total disagreement. The total score is obtained by summing all. Individual item scores, nine of which are reversed. Total score can range from 23 to 92, with higher scores indicting more positive attitudes toward marriage. Braaten & Rosén (1998) reported high internal consistency of the MAS, with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of $\alpha = 0.82$, and high Construct validity.

RBI Relationship Belief Inventory (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982), describes dysfunctional beliefs and includes statements that represent the ways an individual might feel about their relationship with someone else. The statements characterize the following five irrational beliefs: (a) Disagreement is destructive (for example, the disagreement is destructive to a relationship), (b) mind reading is expected (for example, partners should be able to read each other's thoughts), (c) partners cannot be changed (for example, partners are unable to change themselves and their relationships), (d) sexual perfectionism (for example, we should expect sexual perfection from ourselves and/or our partner), and (e) genders are different (for example, men and women have different needs in relationships). The Relationship Beliefs Inventory consists of 40 items, 15 of which are reversed. Respondents are asked to rate on a six-point Likert scale the extent to which they believe each statement is true or false, where 0 means "I strongly believe that the statement is false" and 5 means "I strongly believe that the statement is true." The total score ranges from 0 to 200, with higher scores indicating a greater degree of endorsement of the dysfunctional beliefs. For each subscale, the total score can range from 0 to 40, with higher scores indicating a greater degree of endorsement of the dysfunctional beliefs represented by the respective subscale. (Bradbury & Fincham, 1993). The results obtained by Eidelson and Epstein (1982) indicated internal consistency, convergent validity and construct validity for the subscales used in the instrument. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient calculated for each subscale ranged between .72 and .81, establishing internal consistency. By summing the scores obtained on items 10, 15, 35, 40 we calculated another dimension which we called "difficulties in understanding the opposite sex".

The Romantic Beliefs Scale (RBS) (Sprecher & Metts, 1989) was developed to measure beliefs identified in the literature as specific to the ideology of romanticism. The 15 items assess the following four beliefs: (a) love finds a way (no obstacle is too strong to stand in the way of love); (b) the one and only (there is only one soul mate); (c) idealization; and (d) love at first sight. Respondents are asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 means "strongly disagree" and 7 means "strongly agree". The total score is obtained by summing the individual item scores. The first item is reverse-scored, and higher scores indicate a higher degree of romanticism. The internal consistency of the RBS is generally good, and reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .81 for the entire scale, with a range of .57 to .80 for the subscales. Although the Relationship Belief Inventory and the Romantic Belief Scale assess beliefs about romantic relationships in

general, not specifically beliefs about the marital relationship, I chose to use these instruments because they have been used in the literature before (Sharp & Ganong, 2000) for assessing unmarried young people's beliefs about the marital relationship.

For the third hypothesis, a long-term intervention was implemented, covering topics that integrate elements of law and psychology, with the following content:

Module I: Introduction and demystification of marriage as a legal act

- Meeting 1: Beyond romance – what is marriage, legally? Content: discussion about the difference between the social/emotional contract and the legal contract. What is the Civil Code and how does it regulate love?

- Meeting 2: Engagement and promise of marriage. Content: legal aspects regarding engagement in Romania (legal effects, breaking the engagement and returning gifts). Myths related to the "obligation" to get married.

Module II: Matrimonial regimes (money and property in the couple)

- Meeting 3: The Legal Community – What's Mine Is Yours? Content: the regime of common property versus private property. Debunking myths related to the division of property. Psychological aspects involved in what each party considers a partner regarding money, value, inheritance, loyalty.

- Meeting 4: Prenuptial agreement (separation of property and conventional community of property). Content: what a matrimonial convention really means in Romania. Addressing psychological barriers: why the prenuptial agreement is seen as a "lack of trust" and how it can become an instrument of emotional security.

Module III: Rights, obligations and myths in everyday life

- Meeting 5: Personal rights and duties of spouses. Content: full independence of spouses (choice of profession, residence). Myths related to partner control (the "right" to decide on behalf of the other) vs. the legal obligation of moral support and fidelity.

- Meeting 6: Managing wedding expenses. Content: the legal obligation to contribute to household expenses according to one's means. How unrealistic expectations about money turn into major conflicts.

Module IV: Crisis situations and legal protection

- Meeting 7: Family housing and protection in case of vulnerability. Content: the legal regime of the family home (even if it belongs to only one spouse). Introduction to the legislation on domestic violence and the protection order (the right to safety in the marital space).

- Meeting 8: Divorce myths and legal reality. Content: types of divorce (notarial, court, agreement). Dispelling myths such as "I'll take everything with you in the divorce" or "if I leave home, I lose all my rights" (leaving home vs. de facto separation).

Module V: Responsibility and conclusions

- Meeting 9: Parental authority and the best interests of the child. Content: what "joint custody" means in current legislation, how the parental model in the family of origin (divorce of the subjects' parents) influences their legislative and emotional expectations.

- Meeting 10: Final evaluation and cognitive restructuring. Content: Debriefing session: how young people's dysfunctional beliefs changed after understanding the legal reality behind the institution of marriage.

4. RESULTS

Statistical analysis was performed with SPSS (IBM) 20.0.

The results of the first hypothesis

The first hypothesis assumes - that young people's opinion regarding the ideal age for marriage influences marital attitudes represented by marriage intention, marriage expectations, dysfunctional beliefs about relationships and romantic implications of relationships. Descriptive analysis of the data reveals the following:

Table 1. Descriptive results

Variable / Indicator	N (Valid)	N (Missing)	Media	Standard deviation
Marriage Intention	57	0	11.16	1.976
Total Expectations	57	0	109.85	7.953
Romantic Expectations	57	0	11.60	1.846
Respect	57	0	29.16	1.890
Trust	57	0	24.04	2.003
Financial Expectations	57	0	12.27	2.317
Personal Fulfilment	57	0	20.67	3.370
Physical intimacy	57	0	12.08	2.215
Disagreement is destructive	57	0	13.70	7.539
Difficulty understanding the opposite sex	57	0	9.68	4.368
Mind reading expected	57	0	10.00	3.623
Sexual perfectionism	57	0	11.52	6.466
The sexes have different needs	57	0	7.04	3.818
Partners cannot change	57	0	6.08	4.220
Love finds a way	57	0	32.63	6.718
One love	57	0	11.59	4.940
Idealization	57	0	13.80	4.257

For the first hypothesis, we have a quasi-experimental, unifactorial, between-subjects design, the independent variable is the ideal age for marriage, with two modalities: a) 20–25 years and b) 26–32 years. The dependent variables are intention to marry, expectations from marriage (romantic, respect, trust, financial, personal fulfilment, physical intimacy), dysfunctional beliefs about relationships (disagreement is destructive, difficulty understanding the opposite sex, expected mind reading, sexual perfectionism, sexes have different needs, partners cannot change) and romantic implications of relationships (love finds a way, one love, idealization, love at first sight). The number of subjects aged 20–25 years was 28 and those aged 25–32 years was 29. The subjects' opinions on the ideal age for marriage were heterogeneous, ranging from 20 to 32 years old (24.88). The most common option was 25 years old (36.1%), followed by 27 and 30 years old (14.8% each), while 4.9% of respondents considered that there was no ideal age. From the descriptive data conducted separately by

groups (20-25 years and 25-32 years), it is observed that group 1, which considers the ideal age for marriage to be up to 25 years, has lower marriage intentions, higher general expectations from marriage (romantic, respect, trust, financial, personal fulfilment and physical intimacy) but has lower dysfunctional beliefs (disagreement is destructive, difficulties in understanding the opposite sex, expected mind reading, sexual perfectionism), except for the beliefs that the sexes have different needs and that partners cannot change. Group 2, on the other hand, considers the ideal age for marriage to be from 25 years and up. However, the group that considers the ideal age for marriage to be up to 25 years old are more romantic compared to the second group, thus, they believe that love finds its way, that there is only one love, that love is ideal and they believe in love at first sight rather than the group that considers the ideal age for marriage to be from 25 years old.

The results of the inferential t-test for independent samples reveal significant differences in means between the two groups formed according to the opinion regarding the ideal age for marriage as follows: for global expectations from marriage we have a coefficient value of $t = 3.405$ at a significant threshold $p = 0.001$; for expectations of respect we have a coefficient value of $t = 2.112$ at a significant threshold $p = 0.039$; for trust we have a coefficient value of $t = 2.739$ at a significant threshold $p = 0.008$; for personal fulfilment we have a coefficient value of $t = 3.182$ at a significant threshold $p = 0.002$; for belief in sexual perfectionism we have a coefficient value of $t = -2.741$ at a significant threshold $p = 0.008$; for the belief that partners cannot change we have a coefficient value of $t = -2.707$ at a significant threshold $p = 0.009$; and for the belief that love finds a way we have a coefficient value of $t = 1.987$ at a significant threshold $p = 0.048$.

The conclusions that emerge from the analysis of the hypothesis are in terms of attitudes about marriage, young people who consider that the ideal age for marriage is younger, up to 25 years old, also have higher global expectations from marriage, of respect, trust and personal fulfilment, than young people who consider that the ideal age for marriage is higher, over 25 years old. Moreover, they also have stronger romantic beliefs about relationships, especially the belief that love finds its way to them. On the other hand, young people who consider that the ideal age for marriage is over 25 years old, have more pronounced dysfunctional beliefs, especially regarding sexual perfectionism in the partner and the belief that partners cannot change.

Thus, the first hypothesis of the research is partially confirmed, young people's opinion on the ideal age for marriage influences marital attitudes represented by expectations from marriage, dysfunctional beliefs about relationships, and the romantic implications of relationships.

Second hypothesis results

The second hypothesis assumes - there are significant differences based on young people's gender and background in terms of marital attitudes represented by marriage intention, expectations from marriage, dysfunctional beliefs about relationships, and the romantic implications of relationships.

For the second hypothesis, we have a quasi-experimental, unifactorial, intersubject design, the independent variable is the gender of the young people, with two modalities: a)

male and b) female and separate c) urban, d) rural. The dependent variables are the intention to marry, the expectations from marriage (romantic, respect, trust, financial, personal fulfilment, physical intimacy), dysfunctional beliefs about relationships (disagreement is destructive, difficulties understanding the opposite sex, mind reading expected, sexual perfectionism, the sexes have different needs, partners cannot change) and the romantic implications of relationships (love finds a way, one love, idealization, love at first sight). From the data obtained, conducted separately by groups, it is observed that women ($m=11.91$) have a higher intention to marry than men ($m=10.92$), also, the global expectations from marriage are higher in women ($m=110.46$) than in men ($m=107.09$) as well as in terms of romantic expectations, respect, trust, financial expectations and personal fulfilment. In contrast, men have higher expectations of physical intimacy ($m=12.45$) than women ($m=12$). Regarding dysfunctional beliefs about relationships, men have stronger beliefs than women regarding disagreement in relationships, difficulties in understanding the opposite sex, the expectation of mind reading, sexual perfectionism and the belief that partners cannot change. In contrast, in women, the belief that partners have different needs in the relationship is more strongly represented. Regarding romantic beliefs in relationships, men seem to believe in romance more strongly than women, with the means for all romantic beliefs being higher for men. The results of the inferential t-test for independent samples reveal significant differences in means between the two groups formed by gender as follows: for expectations of respect from marriage we have a coefficient value of $t = -2.141$ at a significant threshold of $p = 0.036$; for belief in sexual perfectionism we have a coefficient value of $t = 1.985$ at a significant threshold of $p = 0.047$; for idealization of the loved one we have a coefficient value of $t = 1.964$ at a significant threshold of $p = 0.053$; and for belief in love at first sight we have a coefficient value of $t = 2.009$ at a significant threshold of $p = 0.049$.

The conclusions that emerge from the analysis of the hypothesis regarding gender differences are in terms of attitudes about marriage, women have higher expectations of respect than men, on the other hand, men have a stronger belief in sexual perfectionism. Men also have higher romantic beliefs than women, especially in terms of idealizing the loved one and believe more strongly in love at first sight. Thus, the second hypothesis of the research is partially confirmed, there are significant differences based on the gender of young people in terms of marital attitudes represented by expectations from marriage, dysfunctional beliefs about relationships and romantic implications of relationships.

From the descriptive data, conducted separately by groups, it is observed that young people from rural areas have a higher intention to marry than young people from urban areas, also, the overall expectations from marriage are higher for young people from rural areas than for young people from urban areas in terms of expectations of respect, trust, financial expectations, personal fulfilment and physical intimacy, with the exception of romantic expectations, which are higher for young people from urban areas. Regarding dysfunctional beliefs about relationships, urban residents have stronger beliefs than young people from rural areas in terms of disagreement in relationships, the expectation of mind reading, sexual perfectionism and the belief that partners cannot change. In contrast, for young people from rural areas, difficulties in understanding the opposite sex and the belief that partners have different needs in the relationship are more strongly represented. Regarding romantic beliefs

about relationships, young people from the countryside believe more strongly that love finds a way into their lives and idealize their loved one more, while young people from the city strongly believe that love happens once in a lifetime and in love at first sight. The results of the inferential t-student test (table 4.7.) for independent samples reveal significant differences in means between the two groups formed according to the background as follows: for expectations of trust in marriage we have a coefficient value of $t = 2.071$ at a significant threshold $p = 0.043$; for the belief that disagreement is destructive we have a coefficient value of $t = -2.073$ at a significant threshold $p = 0.043$; for the belief that partners cannot change we have a coefficient value of $t = -3.006$ at a significant threshold $p = 0.004$; and for belief in one love we have a coefficient value of $t = -2.262$ at a significant threshold $p = 0.027$.

The conclusions that emerge from the analysis of the second hypothesis from the perspective of the differences brought by the subjects' background are: in terms of attitudes about marriage, young people from rural areas have higher expectations of trust than young people from urban areas, in turn, they have a stronger belief in destructive disagreement in relationships and that partners cannot change. Also, young people from the city have a stronger romantic belief in the existence of a single love than young people from the village.

Thus, this part of the second hypothesis of the research is also partially confirmed, there are significant differences based on the background of young people in terms of marital attitudes represented by expectations from marriage, dysfunctional beliefs about relationships, and the romantic implications of relationships.

Results of the third hypothesis

The third hypothesis assumes that young people's participation in the intervention program on legal aspects of the family leads to a significant reduction in dysfunctional beliefs and myths about marriage.

For this hypothesis, the marital status of the parents (married, divorced/separated and other situations – cohabitation, widowed) was related to the intentions of marriage and romantic expectations from it. Marital status of the parents – 39 people have married parents, 16 divorced/separated and 2 other situations. After analysing the data, the following aspects are found: the overall level of expectations from marriage is not influenced by the marital status of the parents. As for the intention to marry of the young people, this is also not influenced by their status. Also for this hypothesis, the entire group of subjects was invited to complete a questionnaire that aimed at: their perception of what the law says about the prenuptial agreement, the legal obligations of spouses, divorce, division of property, raising children in the next two terms if they do not know these topics, if they consider them sufficiently addressed in our country (the response options were on a Likert scale from 0 to 5, where 0 was insufficiently known, and 5 was very well known, and for the second response option 0 was insufficiently addressed and 5 was very well addressed). The data obtained reveal the following: a critical level of legal "illiteracy" among the subjects regarding the institution of marriage. On a Likert scale from 0 to 5, the average score regarding the level of knowledge of legal aspects (prenuptial agreement, inheritance obligations, matrimonial regimes and child custody) was below the moderate threshold ($m=2.40$), indicating insufficient familiarity with the current legislative framework. Moreover, the subjects considered that these topics are "insufficiently addressed" at the national level, the average perception being extremely low

($m=1.45$). These major discrepancies between the social importance of marriage and the actual level of information of young people fully justify and make it imperative to implement a long-term intervention.

After the intervention, the questionnaire was reapplied, and the data revealed that the following subjects achieved an increase in the average scores regarding knowledge of legal aspects ($m=4.45$ which suggests good and very good knowledge). Young people have assimilated what marital regimes, legal obligations and joint custody mean, and the perception of these topics has changed. A radical change in perspective has been observed regarding the prenuptial agreement. At the beginning, they were asked about this topic and 75% of young people associated it with "lack of trust" or "a guaranteed divorce". Post-intervention, over 80% of participants rated its usefulness with grades of 4 and 5 on the Likert scale. Correlating legal information with psychological information reduced unrealistic expectations. The discussion was held around the indicators "Expected mind reading" or "Sexual perfectionism" (from the initial tests) and after the intervention these recorded significant decreases in the averages. Also, the legal myth according to which "in a divorce the mother automatically receives everything, and the father loses any right" was also clarified. If initially the students operated with preconceptions and erroneous information taken from the media or from family history (e.g. the idea that leaving the home leads to the loss of all property), post-intervention they demonstrated a clear understanding of the Civil Code. The most important success of the program was the development of a mature attitude: young people no longer see the law as an intruder in their love relationship, but as a source of protection and clarity for the future family." In conclusion, this hypothesis is also partially confirmed.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of descriptive data by groups highlighted differences in young people's attitudes, expectations, and beliefs towards marriage, depending on the age perceived as ideal for marriage, gender, and background. The group that considers the ideal age for marriage to be up to 25 years old has lower marriage intentions, has higher general expectations from marriage (romantic, respect, trust, financial, personal fulfilment and physical intimacy) but has lower dysfunctional beliefs (disagreement is destructive, difficulty understanding the opposite sex, expected mind reading, sexual perfectionism), except for beliefs that the sexes have different needs and that partners cannot change, compared to the group that considers the ideal age for marriage to be from 25 years old and up. However, the group that considers the ideal age for marriage to be up to 25 years old are more romantic compared to the second group, thus, they believe that love finds its way, that there is only one love, that love is ideal and believe in love at first sight rather than the group that considers the ideal age for marriage to be from 25 years old.

The qualitative analysis of participants' perceptions, open-ended responses, and contextual data provides a deeper understanding of the mentalities, influences, and institutional gaps surrounding marriage among university students. The analysis of the perception of the ideal age indicates a strong concentration of options around the age of 25. This convergence shows that, in the mentality of students, the completion of university studies and the first steps

in their career (specific milestones of the age of 25) are closely linked to the preparation for assuming a lifelong commitment. Dividing the sample into the two groups (20-25 years and 25-32 years) allowed the observation that those who want an earlier marriage also tend to have more idealized/romantic beliefs about the couple, while the older age group manifests a somewhat more pragmatic vision.

The study demonstrates that young students enter the emerging adult stage with high and idealized expectations about marriage, but with severe gaps in terms of the legal reality of this institution. In the absence of formal legal education in schools or universities, young people form their marital beliefs either from parental models at home (which are sometimes dysfunctional or marked by conflicting divorces) or from the media. Based on these conclusions, we can make a recommendation for the introduction of optional courses in “Premarital Counselling and Family Law” in the university environment. The data obtained in the study demonstrate that young people need this guidance to move from myths and fears to a mature, legal and emotional assumption of marriage.

Limitations of the study

The main limitation of the study is the small number of respondents, which implicitly leads to the expansion of the study group for subsequent studies. The relatively small number of subjects makes it difficult to generalize the results to a larger population, so the investigation will be continued with a larger number of respondents. Another limitation of the study is the fact that all respondents are students. Students already have a certain level of education and come from a certain cultural background, which means that their perceptions may differ greatly from those of young people of the same age who have directly entered the labour market or who come from deeply marginalized backgrounds. The subject of marriage, divorce, and especially the relationship between parents is a sensitive one. In the questionnaires and especially the interview, some subjects may tend to provide socially desirable answers (e.g. to minimize dysfunctional beliefs or idealize the relationship between parents), hiding their true perceptions in the desire to leave a good impression.

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EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AS A PREDICTOR OF PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE TO YOUNG PEOPLE

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Abstract

In the context of social, academic and professional challenges specific to the youth period, it becomes essential to develop psychological resources that facilitate effective adaptation to difficult situations. Emotional intelligence represents the individual's ability to perceive, understand, use and regulate their own and others' emotions, contributing to optimal functioning in various life contexts. Psychological resilience reflects the person's ability to cope with adversity, to adapt positively and to maintain emotional balance in stressful conditions. The purpose of this article is to analyze the relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological resilience in young people, highlighting the role of emotional skills in the development of adaptive mechanisms. The analysis of the specialized literature indicates the existence of a significant positive association between the level of emotional intelligence and resilience capacity, suggesting that young people with developed emotional skills demonstrate better stress management, more effective coping strategies and an increased level of psychological well-being. The results highlight the importance of promoting emotional intelligence within educational and psychological programs for youth, in order to strengthen resilience and positive adaptation.

Keywords: resilience, emotional intelligence, youth, behavior, environment

1. INTRODUCTION

Emotions are an integral part of our lives. Every day people experience emotions, feeling their influence in all spheres of their activity. Most often, emotions have an influence on decisions more than we would like.

In this way, it turns out that rational models are often far from being beyond reality. Without taking into account emotional people, rational predictions alone fail to be effective and applicable in practice. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to emotional phenomena and the eyes of those involved in the conversation. Representation periods or stages important for human development are characterized by multiple schemes and provoke the level of personal, social, academic and professional. Crossing the road for adults meant that they bear

responsibility and bear responsibility, face misunderstanding and cannot make decisions that bring fruit. In this context, the identification of the care factor promotes effective adaptation and change in the psychological state, and is also the main sphere of interest of the modern person. (Armstrong, T. 2019).

One of the concepts is to be mindful of the latest developments in this intellectual emotional state. According to the models of Cameron, E., Fox, J., Anderson, M., & Cameron, C. (2010). intellectual emotional measures are aimed at the ability to perceive, for example, the use and gestures of emotions in fashionable care, which facilitates creation and adequate adaptability. Developed abilities allow an individual to effectively provoke stress and stabilize functional interpersonal relationships. Parallel to this, psychological stability requires special attention to resources for positive adaptation to advertising. When you see that a person is able to cope with severe depression, he can recover his strength after two stressful experiences and continue the process of relieving tension from the person. (Bharwaney, G. 2020).

Recent studies proved that stability is the fixation of errors, that is, the process of dynamic influence of individual factors and context. Special serious literature exists in one sphere of relations between intellectual, emotional and stable psychologists. Individual care demonstrates the level of ridicule over intellectual emotions, and also uses emotion control strategies that can be effective, that can cause stress and demonstrate the ability to adapt to provocations. Thus, intellectual emotional potential, which should be considered as a protective factor and a personal resource, important for increasing psychological resilience. On the basis of these considerations, this article can help analyze intellectual emotional aspects in the development and consolidation of psychological stability in school, while proving the main theoretical perspectives and corresponding empirical results in the special literature. Also discussed are the implied practice in these relations within the framework of the project of intervention in psychology and education, health care, and positive and recreational activities. (Greitens, E. 2017).

Young people often face the pressure of distorted social relations, which prevent them from achieving even the most elementary successes in school, work and even in everyday life. Young people, for the most part, it is not so easy to achieve states of joy, satisfaction, recognition, and these states activate their positive interpersonal communication. In the personal structure of young people, most of it is focused on avoiding failures, but such qualities as self-organization, self-regulation and adaptation to stressful or complex situations are not represented enough. Emotional intelligence is particularly important in preparing young people for life's challenges, the intensity and duration of which always remain a mystery to those unintelligible, as well as in interactions with others. This is why the issue of emotional intelligence in young people is of interest to a significant number of scientists, including psychologists, sociologists, and other researchers. (Goleman, D. 2018). Without a high level of emotional intelligence and resilience to life's challenges, today's youth will be unable to overcome the difficulties of personal and professional development. How people experience negative events and evaluate the accompanying experience plays a very important role in identifying and developing post-traumatic disorders. When faced with stressors, the person chooses various protective mechanisms and ways of resisting the harmful factor.

The concept of vitality denotes a set of mechanisms and strategies that a person undertakes when experiencing a difficult period and experiencing an acute need for resources to maintain psycho-emotional balance. It's about successfully overcoming the most acute difficulties and devastating experiences, as well as avoiding the devastating effects of stress as much as possible. Although the term "resilience" initially referred only to the individual, over time it has expanded to include family, community, and even entire societies and cultures. It has been established that the process of developing and improving resilience occurs throughout life. (Pleşca, M., & Ceban, C. 2025).

Resilience to one stressor does not necessarily translate to another, especially to a combination of challenging events or situations. A direct correlation between resilience and emotional intelligence has also been confirmed: if a stressor is successfully neutralized, psychological resilience increases, while if it is not, it decreases. Pleşca, M., & Ceban, C. (2025).

2. OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESES

2.1. OBJECTIVE

This study is aim to explore emotional intelligence as a determining factor and an important personal resource in the development and strengthening of psychological resilience in young people, analyzing theoretical foundations and relevant empirical findings from the specialized literature. The article aims to identify the relationship between emotional competencies and the ability to positively adapt to stressful and adverse situations, as well as to identify the mechanisms through which the perception, understanding, and regulation of emotions contribute to the maintenance of psychological balance, the use of effective strategies, and the resolution of problems characteristic of young people. The study also aims to identify the importance of emotional intelligence in promoting mental health, psychological well-being, and positive development in young people, providing theoretical and practical recommendations for the development of educational and psychological interventions aimed at enhancing resilience.

2.2. HYPOTHESES

The following research hypotheses were formulated:

H1: There are statistically significant differences in emotional intelligence and psychological resilience among young people, depending on gender.

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological resilience in young people: high levels of emotional intelligence are associated with high levels of psychological resilience, and low levels of emotional intelligence are associated with low levels of psychological resilience.

3. METHOD

This research is based on a quantitative correlation-comparative design. The purpose of the research is to study the relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological stability in young people, and also to identify differences in the manifestation of these variables depending on gender. The study involved a total of 136 young people aged 18 to 35 years. The participants were selected by the convenient sampling method and participated in the study voluntarily. All respondents were informed about the purpose of the research, the anonymous nature of the participation and the confidentiality of the data provided. The composition of the sample allowed a comparative analysis of the level of emotional intelligence and psychological stability depending on gender to verify the formulated hypotheses.

To assess the psychological variables like emotional intelligence, was used the Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (EIQ) developed by Daniel Goleman. It assesses emotional competencies such as emotional awareness, emotional self-control, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills. This instrument allows for an assessment of overall emotional intelligence and the identification of emotional resources that facilitate adaptation and effective functioning in various life contexts. To assess psychological variables like resilience, was used the Resilience Test (RTT) developed by Dr. Al Siebert. This instrument measures a person's ability to cope with difficult situations, adapt to change, and overcome stressful experiences. The test provides information on the level of psychological resilience and the personal resources used to manage everyday challenges.

Data collection was conducted in person, directly with the subjects; they were given paper questionnaires. Participants completed the questionnaires individually after providing informed consent. The average time to complete the questionnaires was approximately 15–20 minutes. The study adhered to ethical principles specific to psychological research, ensuring voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality of the data collected. The information collected was used exclusively for scientific purposes.

4. RESULTS

To test the research hypotheses, descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were performed using the SPSS Statistics program. Initially, descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages) were calculated to characterize the sample and describe the distribution of emotional intelligence and psychological resilience levels. Differences between girls and boys were analyzed using the Student's t-test for independent samples, and the distribution of emotional intelligence levels by gender was examined using the χ^2 (Chi-square) test of independence. The relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological resilience was analyzed using the Pearson correlation coefficient (r). The statistical significance level was set at $p < 0.05$.

In addition to the statistical significance tests, effect size indicators were also calculated to assess the practical importance of the results. Thus, for comparisons between means, Cohen's d index was used, for associations between categorical variables, Cramer's V

was calculated, and for correlational analysis, the coefficient of determination (r^2) was determined.

Table 1. Distribution of emotional intelligence levels by gender.

Level of emotional intelligence	Girls (n=72)	%	Boys (n=64)	%
Above average	19	26,39	2	3,12
Average	28	38,89	24	37,50
Below average	25	34,72	38	59,38
Total	72	100	64	100

Note. $\chi^2(2, N = 136) = 14.96, p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .33$, indicating a moderate association

between gender and emotional intelligence level.

The association between gender and emotional intelligence level was examined using the Chi-square test of independence.

The analysis revealed the existence of a statistically significant association between gender and emotional intelligence level, $\chi^2(2, N = 136) = 14.96, p < 0.001$, and Cramer's V value = 0.33 indicates a moderate effect size, according to the criteria proposed by Cohen.

Girls recorded a significantly higher proportion of an above-average level of emotional intelligence (26.39%) compared to boys (3.12%), while boys were represented in a considerably higher proportion in the below-average level category (59.38% compared to 34.72%).

These results suggest that gender explains a significant part of the variability in emotional intelligence level. Although the relationship is not strong, the effect size demonstrates that the observed differences are not only statistically significant, but also practically relevant, confirming the tendency of girls to demonstrate more developed emotional competence than boys.

To compare girls and boys in terms of emotional intelligence dimensions, the Student's t-test for independent samples was applied, and to estimate the practical importance of the differences, the Cohen's d index was calculated.

Table 2. Gender differences in emotional intelligence dimensions

Scale	Boys M	SD	Girls M	SD	t	p	Cohen's d
Self-motivation	10.03	5.11	13.22	2.89	-3.348	.001	0.76
Empathy	10.90	4.93	13.49	3.26	-2.673	.009	0.61
Recognizing others' emotions	5.97	5.31	9.88	3.96	-3.581	.001	0.84
General eotional intelligence	49.48	16.91	61.76	14.48	-3.312	.001	0.78

Note. Independent-samples t tests. Cohen's d values: 0.20 = small, 0.50 = medium,

0.80 = large effect.

The results show that girls scored significantly higher than boys on self-motivation, empathy, recognizing the emotions of others, and general emotional intelligence.

The largest difference between groups was identified for the ability to recognize the emotions of others ($d = 0.84$), which represents a large effect. Differences on self-motivation and general emotional intelligence recorded moderate-large effects ($d \approx 0.78$), and empathy showed a moderate effect ($d = 0.61$).

These results demonstrate that statistically significant differences are accompanied by practically relevant differences, suggesting that gender explains an important part of the variation in emotional skills.

Table 3. Distribution of participants according to the level of psychological resilience

Level of psychological resilience	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Low	6	4,3
Medium	115	84.5
High	15	11.2
Total	136	100.0

The descriptive analysis highlighted the predominance of the average level of psychological resilience within the investigated sample. Thus, 84.5% of the participants presented an average level of psychological resilience, 11.2% a high level, and only 4.3% were classified as low.

This distribution suggests that most young people have sufficient psychological resources to cope with everyday difficulties and stressful situations. The low share of participants with low resilience reflects the existence of relatively well-developed adaptive mechanisms within the investigated group.

Correlational analysis

The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationships between emotional intelligence, psychological resilience, gender, and maladaptive coping strategies.

The analysis revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and psychological resilience ($r = 0.201$; $p < 0.05$). According to Cohen's (1988) criteria, this value represents a small effect size. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.040$) indicates that emotional intelligence explains approximately 4.0% of the variance in psychological resilience.

Although statistically significant, this relationship is relatively modest, suggesting that emotional intelligence is only one of the factors contributing to the development of psychological resilience.

Also, a weak positive correlation was identified between gender and psychological resilience ($r = 0.229$; $p < 0.05$), corresponding to an explained variation of approximately 5.2% ($r^2 = 0.052$), which indicates the existence of modest differences between girls and boys regarding the level of resilience.

Regarding coping strategies, psychological resilience was negatively correlated with the use of maladaptive behaviors, such as alcohol and drug use ($r = -0.262$; $p < 0.05$). This relationship represents a small to moderate effect, the coefficient of determination ($r^2 =$

0.069) showing that approximately 6.9% of the variation in the use of these behaviors is explained by the level of psychological resilience. Overall, all identified relationships are statistically significant, but the effect sizes indicate relatively modest influences, suggesting that psychological resilience is determined by a complex set of psychological and social factors.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The research results partially confirm the hypothesis regarding the existence of a relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological resilience in young people. Although the identified correlation is statistically significant ($r = 0.201$; $p < 0.05$), its intensity is low, the coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.040$) indicating that emotional intelligence explains approximately 4% of the variation in psychological resilience.

The differences between girls and boys in terms of emotional intelligence presented moderate and large effect sizes (Cohen's d between 0.61 and 0.84), demonstrating that female participants demonstrate significantly more developed emotional competencies, especially in the areas of empathy, self-motivation and recognition of others' emotions. At the same time, the association between gender and the level of emotional intelligence, expressed by Cramer's $V = 0.33$, indicates a moderate effect, with practical relevance. Psychological resilience was negatively associated with the use of maladaptive coping strategies ($r = -0.262$), but this relationship also presented a low to moderate intensity ($r^2 = 6.9\%$), confirming that people with a higher level of resilience resort less frequently to dysfunctional stress management behaviors. Overall, the results suggest that emotional intelligence is an important protective factor, but not a determinant, of psychological resilience.

The relatively low effect size values indicate that resilience is a multidimensional construct, influenced by numerous other factors, such as social support, coping strategies, personality characteristics, family climate, socioeconomic context and life experiences. Consequently, future research should use multivariate statistical models (multiple regression, mediation and moderation models or structural equation modeling) to identify the relative contribution of these predictors and the mechanisms through which emotional intelligence influences the development of psychological resilience, empathy, self-motivation and recognition of others' emotions. At the same time, the association between gender and the level of emotional intelligence, expressed by Cramer's $V = 0.33$, indicates a moderate effect, with practical relevance.

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CAUSES AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF MARITAL DISSOLUTION AS PERCEIVED BY MARRIED ADULTS IN OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Marriage is a highly valued institution in Nigeria; however, marital dissolution through separation and divorce has become increasingly prevalent. This study investigated the perceived causes and psychological consequences of marital dissolution among married adults in Oyo State, Nigeria, and examined the influence of gender and age on these perceptions. A descriptive survey design was adopted. The population comprised 2,823,440 married adults, from which 402 respondents were selected. Data were collected using the Causes and Psychological Impact of Marital Dissolution Questionnaire (CPIMDQ), which was validated for face and content validity and demonstrated satisfactory test-retest reliability coefficients of 0.78 and 0.81. Data were analyzed using percentages, mean scores, rank order, t-test, and ANOVA. Findings revealed that domestic violence, infidelity, unresolved conflicts, differences in values and beliefs, and sexual incompatibility were the major causes of marital dissolution. Respondents also perceived that marital dissolution contributes to children's low self-esteem, learning difficulties, behavioural problems, social stigma, and depression. Gender did not significantly influence perceptions of either the causes or psychological consequences of marital dissolution. However, age significantly influenced perceptions of its causes, though not its psychological effects. The study recommends that marriage counsellors provide conflict-resolution and emotional-intimacy interventions, implement child-centered counselling programmes, and encourage mutual emotional support among couples during marital challenges.

Keywords: causes, psychological impact, marital dissolution, married adults

1. INTRODUCTION

Marriage requires love, understanding, tolerance and sacrifice. It is expected to benefit the two parties involved, the society as well as the children both in health, growth and

happiness. It requires the couples to live in harmony in order to enjoy sustainable relationships but some marriages ended up in marital dissolution. Marital dissolution which is also known as divorce is defined by Meyer (2019) as a legal action between married people to terminate their marriage relationship. It can be referred to as termination of marriage and is basically, the legal action that ends the marriage before the death of either spouse. Cavanagh (2017) described marital dissolution as the formal termination of a marital union through legal means, primarily through divorce or annulment, leading to the cessation of marital rights and obligations between the partners.

Marital dissolution could be temporal or permanent. It is temporal when there is still hope of coming together after the relevant laws have been put in place. This is to ensure that issues that created the temporal separation are settled. But if the marital dissolution is permanent, it means there is no hope of coming together (Pilapil, 2019). Marital dissolution has to do with either one of the partners quitting or saying "bye-bye" to his/her spouse as a result of infidelity, pride, superstition, religion, disagreement, in-laws interferences, alcoholism, and disrespect for one another or bullying (Khosi & Ravhuhali, 2016; Pilapil, 2019).

Similar to marriage, divorce is a common social phenomenon across many cultures and societies, although the laws, requirements, and procedures governing it differ from one society to another (Singh & Bhandari, 2021; Zaman & Chavis, 2019). The occurrence of divorce also varies across socioeconomic groups, with patterns influenced by education, income level, and social standing. Divorce associated with migration and extramarital affairs tends to be more prevalent among newly affluent individuals, whereas marriages among professionals, administrators, and members of higher socioeconomic groups often demonstrate greater stability.

Conversely, individuals with lower educational attainment and reduced socioeconomic status are more likely to experience marital separation or abandonment. Economic security, access to resources, and opportunities for social advancement can enhance couples' ability to manage and resolve marital conflicts effectively. However, among individuals who possess substantial financial resources and social influence, marital instability may still arise due to factors such as extramarital involvement or the pursuit of alternative relationships, which can ultimately lead to divorce (Kavas & Gündüz-Hoşgör, 2016; Nazari, Mohammadkhani, Awissi & Davarniya, 2018).

Marital dissolution, encompassing divorce and separation, is a significant social issue in Nigeria, although scholarly research on this topic remains limited. Utilizing secondary data, drawing on data obtained from the 2006 Nigerian Population Census, the study presents a detailed examination of the prevalence of marital dissolution across various geopolitical regions, states, gender categories, and age cohorts. The analysis offers valuable insights into the distribution and patterns of marital dissolution within the country. It also reports the overall crude marital dissolution rate in Nigeria, providing a broad measure of the occurrence of marital breakdown nationwide. It was found to be 11 per 1000 population in 2006. Among the ever-married population, this rate increased to 29.5 per 1000 in 2018. Notably, there were significant regional variations: marital dissolution was most prevalent in the South-south and North-east regions, while the South-east region exhibited the lowest rates. Gender differences were also evident, with a higher number of females experiencing divorce or separation

compared to males. Age-specific rates further highlighted this trend, ranging The rates ranged from 24 to 132 per 1,000 ever-married women and from 15 to 24 per 1,000 ever-married men. The highest incidence of marital dissolution was observed among younger people aged 10–24 years (National Population Commission, 2023).

Marital dissolution in Nigeria, like in many other parts of the world, is driven by a complex interplay of various factors. One of the primary causes is economic stress. Financial instability and disagreements over money management are significant contributors to marital discord. According to Adigun (2018), economic hardships can exacerbate tensions between spouses, leading to increased conflict and, eventually, separation or divorce. The pressure to meet financial obligations often strains relationships, particularly in contexts where traditional gender roles place the burden of financial provision on men. Infidelity is another critical factor contributing to marital dissolution. Extramarital affairs can severely undermine the trust and emotional bond between spouses, leading to irreparable damage to the relationship. Studies have shown that infidelity is a common reason for divorce across different regions in Nigeria, as it challenges the foundational trust that marriages are built upon (Oladeji & Bamidele, 2017).

Communication issues also play a pivotal role in the breakdown of marriages. Effective communication is essential for resolving conflicts and maintaining a healthy relationship. However, many couples struggle with poor communication skills, which can lead to misunderstandings and unresolved conflicts. According to Adeoye and Oyeniyi (2019), the inability to communicate effectively often results in feelings of frustration and emotional disconnection, which can ultimately lead to divorce. Cultural and societal changes have also influenced marital stability. The increasing acceptance of divorce and changing attitudes towards marriage have made it more socially acceptable to end an unhappy marriage. This shift is particularly evident among younger generations, who may prioritize personal happiness and fulfilment over traditional marital obligations (Nwoke, 2017). Additionally, domestic violence is a significant cause of marital dissolution. Physical, emotional, and psychological abuse creates an unsafe and unhealthy environment for the victim, making it difficult to sustain the marriage. The prevalence of domestic violence in Nigeria has led many affected individuals to seek divorce as a means of escaping abusive relationships (Eze-Anaba, 2017).

The termination of a marital relationship can result in numerous emotional and psychological difficulties for those involved. Many individuals go through profound emotional distress, including sadness, anxiety, depressive symptoms, and feelings of isolation (Amato, 2016). The breakdown of a marriage often disrupts an individual's emotional stability and overall mental well-being disrupts the emotional stability and security that many derive from their relationships, leading to a profound sense of loss and failure. This emotional turmoil can negatively impact mental health, sometimes necessitating professional intervention to cope with the distress. The sense of loss can trigger intense feelings of grief, akin to the grief experienced after the death of a loved one (Sbarra & Coan, 2018). The emotional upheaval can manifest in various forms, including depression, anxiety, and loneliness, as the individual struggles to adjust to their new reality without their former partner (Amato, 2016).

The emotional turmoil that often accompanies the end of a marriage can have far-reaching impacts on an individual's mental health and well-being. The disruption to one's emotional stability and security can exacerbate existing mental health conditions or trigger the onset of new ones (Amato, 2016; Sbarra & Coan, 2018). The stress and upheaval associated with divorce can also contribute to the development of unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as substance abuse or unhealthy eating habits (Sbarra & Coan, 2018). Moreover, marital dissolution frequently affects social relationships and networks. Divorced individuals might find themselves isolated as mutual friends choose sides or withdraw from the conflict (Sbarra, Law, & Portley, 2016). This social isolation can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and depression, making it more difficult for individuals to recover from the emotional upheaval. Furthermore, the stigma associated with divorce in some cultures and communities can lead to social ostracism and a reduction in social support, which is crucial for emotional recovery (Lambert & Dollahite, 2018). Research indicates that children may experience emotional and behavioural issues, including anxiety, depression, and academic difficulties (Harper, 2018).

The psychological impact of marital dissolution can vary significantly depending on various factors, including gender and age. Gender plays a crucial role on how individuals cope with the emotional and practical challenges of divorce. Kalmijn (2020) reported that women often experience greater emotional distress and a more significant decline in overall well-being compared to men following a divorce. This may be attributed to societal expectations, financial considerations, and the traditional roles women often assume within marriages (Zheng, Kang & Huang, 2022). However, it is important to note that men are not immune to divorce can have significant psychological effects on individuals, and people may face distinct difficulties when it comes to expressing their feelings and obtaining emotional support (Kalmijn, 2020). In addition, age plays an important role in shaping how individuals experience and cope with the emotional consequences of marital dissolution. Older individuals who experience marital dissolution may grapple with feelings of loneliness and social isolation, particularly if they have been married for an extended period (Zheng, Kang & Huang, 2022). After years of sharing their lives with a partner, the sudden absence of that companionship can leave a profound void and contribute to a sense of disconnection from their social environment. Furthermore, older individuals may face challenges in adapting to changes in their living arrangements and routines after a divorce (Rhoades, Kamp-Dush, Atkins, Stanley & Markman, 2016).

The impact of divorce on children can have long-lasting consequences, including emotional and behavioural problems, academic difficulties, and strained relationships with one or both parents (Amato, 2016). As a result, parents must navigate the delicate task of providing emotional support and stability for their children while also managing their struggles and adjustments (Zheng, Kang & Huang, 2022). For couples who have been married for a significant amount of time and have children, the dissolution of their marriage can be an incredibly complex and emotionally taxing experience. The emotional investments, shared experiences, and the well-being of children all contribute to the psychological challenges individuals face during and after the divorce process (Rhoades et al., 2016; Amato, 2016; Sbarra & Coan, 2018). It is in light of this that the researchers investigated the

causes and psychological impact of marital dissolution as perceived by married adults in Oyo State, Nigeria.

Marital dissolution is a pervasive issue that affects individuals across various social strata in Nigeria, including celebrities, pastors, politicians, musicians, medical doctors, lecturers, lawyers, law enforcement agents, traditional rulers, farmers, and fishermen. This widespread occurrence underscores that marital dissolution is not confined to any particular socioeconomic or professional group. Instead, it highlights the universal challenges faced by marriages across diverse backgrounds and occupations. Celebrities and public figures often experience high levels of divorce, likely due to the pressures and scrutiny associated with their public lives. Pastors and religious leaders are not immune, facing personal and professional challenges that can strain their marital relationships. Politicians, with their demanding careers and public expectations, also show significant rates of divorce. Similarly, musicians and entertainers, who often lead dynamic and itinerant lifestyles, may find maintaining stable marital relationships challenging. The breakdown of a marital union can have profound psychological and social consequences not only for the couple involved, but also for their children, extended families, and communities. Despite the cherished position of marriage in many tribes of Nigeria especially Oyo State which is predominantly Yoruba tribe, little is known about the specific factors contributing to the rising rates of marital dissolution in this region. This study examined the causes and psychological impact of marital dissolution as perceived by married adults in Oyo State, Nigeria.

2. OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESES

2.1. OBJECTIVE

The main objectives of the were to:

- investigate the causes of marital dissolution as perceived by married adults in Oyo State, Nigeria.
- identify the psychological impacts of marital dissolution as perceived by married adults in Oyo State, Nigeria.

The following research questions were raised to guide the conduct of this study:

1. What are the causes of marital dissolution as perceived by married adults in Oyo State, Nigeria?
2. What are the psychological impacts of marital dissolution as perceived by married adults in Oyo State, Nigeria?

2.2. HYPOTHESES

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested in the study:

H1: There is no significant difference in the causes of marital dissolution as perceived by married adults in Oyo State, Nigeria based on gender.

H2: There is no significant difference in the psychological impacts of marital dissolution as perceived by married adults in Oyo State, Nigeria based on gender

H3: There is no significant difference in the causes of marital dissolution as perceived by married adults in Oyo State, Nigeria based on age.

H4: There is no significant difference in the psychological impacts of marital dissolution as perceived by married adults in Oyo State, Nigeria based on age.

3. METHOD

This study employed a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised all married adults in Oyo State, estimated at 2,823,440 according to the National Population Commission (2023). However, the study focused specifically on literate married adults within the state as the target population.

According to Research Advisors (2006), a sample size of 383 was recommended for a population of this magnitude at a 95% confidence level and 2.5% margin of error. The researcher added 5% of the sample size which was 19, therefore the sample size used for this study was 402 to take care of attrition.

The multi-stage sampling technique was used in the selection of the sample. Simple random and purposive sampling techniques were used to select the sample. At stage one, the simple random technique It was employed to choose two local government areas from each of the three senatorial districts in Oyo State. which are Oyo Central (comprises of Afijio, Akinyele, Atiba, Egbeda, Lagelu, Ogo Oluwa, Oluyole, Ona Ara, Oyo East, Oyo West, and Surulere Local Government Areas), Oyo North (comprises of Atisbo, Irepo, Iseyin, Itesiwaju, Iwajowa, Kajola, Ogbomosho North, Ogbomosho South, Olorunsogo, Orelope, Ori Ire, Saki East, and Saki West Local Government Areas) and Oyo South (comprises of Ibadan North, Ibadan North-East, Ibadan North-West, Ibadan South-East, Ibadan South-West, Ibarapa Central, Ibarapa East, Ibarapa North, and Ido Local Government Areas). n total, six local government areas were selected from the thirty-three local government areas in Oyo State using a dip-hat sampling technique. This method involved writing the names of all local government areas on separate pieces of paper, placing them in a container, thoroughly mixing them, and then randomly drawing entries to determine the selected areas. Using this approach, two local government areas were chosen from each of the three senatorial districts in the state.

In addition, purposive sampling was employed to identify locations with a high concentration of literate married adults, such as schools, churches, mosques, ministries, and market environments. Finally, simple random sampling was used to select 67 married adults who participated in the study. Therefore, the total of respondents that were sampled for the study were 402 (67 x 6) married adults.

The instrument used in collecting data for this research was a researcher-designed questionnaire titled "Causes and Psychological Impact of Marital Dissolution Questionnaire (CPIMDQ)." The instrument has three sections, A, B and C. Section A contains respondents' demographic information of gender and age. Items in the questionnaire especially, sections B and C were derived from information obtained from the review of related literature. Section B focused on causes of marital dissolution while Section C focused on psychological impact of marital dissolution. Sections B and C were patterned after four-point Likert-type of Strongly Agree (SA): Agree (A): Disagree (D): and Strongly Disagree (SD) with scoring

points of 4-1. The instrument was validated by 5 experts in Counselling. The instrument was later subjected to test re-test reliability and the results of the reliability test showed coefficients of 0.78 for the scale measuring causes of marital dissolution and 0.81 for the instrument assessing the psychological effects of marital dissolution

The collected data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The results obtained from the demographic data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as percentages while mean and rank order were used to answer the research questions. Inferential statistics of Analysis of Variance and t-test statistical techniques were employed to examine the formulated null hypotheses. Specifically, hypotheses one and two were analysed using the t-test, while hypotheses three and four were evaluated using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). All tests were conducted at a 0.05 level of significance.

4. RESULTS

The instrument was administered to 402 married adults and all the questionnaire forms were retrieved. The results revealed that 173 (43.0%) of the respondents were male, while 229 (57.0%) of the respondents were female. This implies that there were more female respondents than males in this study. A total of 227 (56.5%) of the respondents were between 20-35 years of age, 126 (31.3%) of the respondents were between 36-50 years of age, while 49 (12.2%) of the respondents were 51 years of age and above. This means that respondents aged between 20-35 years participated more in the study.

Research Question 1: What are the causes of marital dissolution as perceived by married adults in Oyo State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean, Standard Deviation and Rank Order Analysis of the Respondents' Perceptions on Causes of Marital Dissolution

Item No	As far as I am concerned, the following are the causes of marital dissolution among married adults:	Mean	S.D.	Rank order
7	domestic violence	3.25	.674	1st
2	infidelity	3.22	.750	2nd
8	unresolved conflicts	3.21	.800	3rd
4	differences in values and beliefs	3.20	.655	4th
10	sexual incompatibility	3.19	.795	5th
13	high level of jealousy	3.19	.722	5th
6	unrealistic expectations	3.18	.713	7th
15	health issues such as HIV/AIDS	3.17	.694	8th
5	lack of emotional support	3.15	.625	9th
14	unmet expectations	3.14	.667	10th
3	financial problems	3.10	.710	11th
11	inability to manage stress	3.08	.633	12th
12	different parenting styles	3.06	.622	13th
1	ineffective communication	3.04	.835	14th
9	lack of trust	3.03	.689	15th

Table 1 indicates the mean, standard deviation and rank order analysis of the respondents' perceptions on causes of marital dissolution. The table indicates that items 7, 2 and 8 which state that causes of Domestic violence, infidelity, and unresolved conflicts were

identified as the leading causes of marital dissolution among married adults, ranking first, second, and third respectively, with mean scores of 3.25, 3.22, and 3.21. In the same vein, items 12, 1, and 9 indicated that differences in parenting approaches, poor communication, and lack of trust also contribute significantly to marital breakdown among couples, thus ranked 13th, 14th and 15th with mean scores of 3.06, 3.04 and 3.03 respectively were ranked the least factors. Since all the fifteen items have a mean score that is above the 2.50 cut-off point, it can be said that married adults attested that there are many causes of marital dissolution but the most prominent are domestic violence; infidelity; unresolved conflicts; differences in values and beliefs; and sexual incompatibility are the main causes of marital dissolution.

Research Question 2: What are the psychological impacts of marital dissolution as perceived by married adults in Oyo State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation and Rank Order Analysis of the Respondents' Perceptions on the Psychological Impacts of Marital Dissolution

Item No.	As far as I am concerned: marital dissolution:	Mean	S.D.	Rank order
8	could make children develop low self-esteem	3.04	1.06	1st
9	could create learning difficulties for children.	2.94	.992	2nd
11	may cause behavioural problems among children	2.91	1.08	3rd
15	may often cause social stigma	2.89	.998	4th
4	can trigger depression	2.88	1.09	5th
1	lead to long-term emotional distress	2.82	1.00	6th
7	may lead to difficulty in trusting others	2.81	1.05	7th
12	often results in feelings of long-lasting resentment among discoured couples	2.80	1.06	8th
5	can lead to a high level of anxiety	2.80	1.01	8th
2	can lead to sleepless night	2.79	.942	10th
10	could lead to a weakened bond between children and parents	2.73	1.03	11th
3	can result in a loss of self-esteem	2.73	1.04	11th
13	typically causes intense feelings of grief and loss	2.70	.973	13th
14	create difficulty in maintaining mutual friendships	2.68	1.04	14th
6	can strain relationships with friends and family	2.54	1.10	15th

Table 2 indicates the mean, standard deviation and rank order analysis of respondents' perceptions of the psychological impacts of marital dissolution. The table indicates that items 8, 9 and 11 which state that marital dissolution: could make children develop low self-esteem; could create learning difficulty for children; and may cause behavioural problems among children ranked 1st, 2nd and 3rd with mean scores of 3.04, 2.94 and 2.91 respectively. On the same note, items 13, 14 and 6 which state that marital dissolution: typically causes intense feelings of grief and loss; creates difficulty in maintaining mutual friendships; and can strain relationships with friends and family ranked 13th, 14th and 15th with the mean scores of 2.70, 2.68 and 2.54 respectively were ranked the least. Since all the 15 listed items have a mean score that is above the 2.50 cut-off point, it can be said that married adults attested that marital dissolution could make children develop low self-esteem; could create learning difficulty for children; may cause behavioural problems among children; may often cause social stigma; can trigger depression and among others.

H1: There is no significant difference in the causes of marital dissolution as perceived by married adults in Oyo State, Nigeria based on gender.

Table 3: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value showing differences in the Respondents' Perceptions on Causes of Marital Dissolution Based on Gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value	p-value
Male	173	46.93	8.54	400	.623	1.96	.534
Female	229	47.45	7.94				

Table 3 shows that the calculated t-value of .623 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96 with a corresponding p-value of .534 which is greater than 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, thus hypothesis accepted.

H2: There is no significant difference in the psychological impacts of marital dissolution as perceived by married adults in Oyo State, Nigeria based on gender

Table 4: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value showing differences in the Respondents' Perceptions on the Psychological Impacts of Marital Dissolution Based on Gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value	p-value
Male	173	42.21	10.47	400	.263	1.96	.793
Female	229	41.93	11.15				

Table 4 shows that the calculated t-value of .263 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96 with a corresponding p-value of .793 which is higher than the 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, thus hypothesis accepted.

H3: There is no significant difference in the causes of marital dissolution as perceived by married adults in Oyo State, Nigeria based on age

Table 5: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing differences in the Respondents' Perceptions on Causes of Marital Dissolution Based on Age

Source	SS	df	Mean Squares	Cal. F-ratio	Crit. F-ratio	P-value
Between Groups	1946.497	2	973.248	15.51*	3.00	.000
Within Groups	25023.354	399	62.715			
Total	26969.851	401				

* Significant, $p < 0.05$

Table 5 shows the calculated F-ratio of 15.51 is greater than the critical F-value of 3.00 with a corresponding p-value of .000 which is less than 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is less than 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is rejected. thus hypothesis rejected. To ascertain where the significant difference lies, Scheffe Post-Hoc was carried out and the output is shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Scheffe post-hoc where the significant difference lies based on Age

Year	N	Subset for Alpha = 0.05		
		1	2	3
20-35 years	227	45.92		
36-50 years	126		47.39	
51 years and above	49			52.86
Sig.		.431	1.000	1.000

Table 6 reveals that respondents who were between the ages of 20-35 years have a mean score of 45.92 (in subset 1), those who were between 36-50 years have a mean score of 47.39 (in subset 2), while those who were 51 years of age and above have a highest mean score of 52.86 (in subset 3) and thus, contributed to the significant difference.

H4: There is no significant difference in the psychological impacts of marital dissolution as perceived by married adults in Oyo State, Nigeria based on age.

Table 7: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing differences in the Respondents' Perceptions on the Psychological Impacts of Marital Dissolution Based on Age

Source	SS	df	Mean Squares	Cal. F-ratio	Crit. F-ratio	P-value
Between Groups	175.388	2	87.694	.743	3.00	.476
Within Groups	47063.617	399	117.954			
Total	47239.005	401				

Table 7 shows the calculated F-ratio of .743 is less than the critical F-value of 3.00 with a corresponding p-value of .476 which was more than 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is more than 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is not rejected. Hence, there is no significant difference in the psychological impacts of marital dissolution as perceived by married adults in Oyo State, Nigeria based on age.

Using the statistics reported in the Results section, the effect sizes for the inferential analyses can be estimated as follows.

Hypothesis	Test	Test Statistic	Effect Size	Magnitude
H ₁ : Causes of marital dissolution by gender	Independent samples <i>t</i> -test	$t(400) = 0.623, p = .534$	Cohen's $d \approx 0.06$	Trivial
H ₂ : Psychological impacts by gender	Independent samples <i>t</i> -test	$t(400) = 0.263, p = .793$	Cohen's $d \approx 0.03$	Trivial
H ₃ : Causes of marital dissolution by age	One-way ANOVA	$F(2,399) = 15.51, p < .001$	$\eta^2 = 0.072$	Medium
H ₄ : Psychological impacts by age	One-way ANOVA	$F(2,399) = 0.743, p = .476$	$\eta^2 = 0.004$	Trivial

Interpretation and Discussion of the Effect Sizes

Hypothesis One

Although no statistically significant gender difference was found in perceptions of the causes of marital dissolution ($t(400) = 0.623, p = .534$), the effect size was **Cohen's $d \approx 0.06$** ,

indicating a **trivial practical effect**. This suggests that male and female married adults held almost identical views regarding the causes of marital dissolution. Therefore, even with a larger sample size, any gender difference would likely remain of little practical importance.

Hypothesis Two

The gender difference in perceptions of the psychological impacts of marital dissolution was also non-significant ($t(400) = 0.263, p = .793$), with **Cohen's $d \approx 0.03$** . This represents a **negligible effect**, indicating that the psychological consequences of marital dissolution are perceived similarly by both men and women. The extremely small effect size reinforces the conclusion that gender contributes very little to differences in these perceptions.

Hypothesis Three

The ANOVA examining age differences in perceptions of the causes of marital dissolution yielded a statistically significant result ($F(2,399) = 15.51, p < .001$). The corresponding effect size was $\eta^2 = 0.072$, indicating that approximately **7.2% of the variance** in perceived causes of marital dissolution was explained by age group. According to Cohen's (1988) guidelines (0.01 = small, 0.06 = medium, 0.14 = large), this represents a **medium effect size**. This finding suggests that age is not only statistically significant but also has meaningful practical importance. Older respondents (51 years and above) perceived the causes of marital dissolution differently from younger respondents, as confirmed by the Scheffé post hoc analysis.

Hypothesis Four

For perceptions of the psychological impacts of marital dissolution, age differences were not statistically significant ($F(2,399) = 0.743, p = .476$). The estimated effect size was $\eta^2 = 0.004$, indicating that age accounted for only **0.4% of the variance** in respondents' perceptions. This constitutes a **trivial effect**, demonstrating that age has virtually no practical influence on how married adults perceive the psychological consequences of marital dissolution.

To complement the significance tests, effect sizes were computed to determine the practical significance of the findings. The independent-samples t -test comparing male and female respondents on perceived causes of marital dissolution yielded a trivial effect (Cohen's $d \approx 0.06$), while the comparison on perceived psychological impacts also produced a negligible effect (Cohen's $d \approx 0.03$). For the ANOVA analyses, age differences in perceived causes of marital dissolution produced a medium effect ($\eta^2 = 0.072$), indicating that approximately 7.2% of the variance in perceptions was attributable to age. Conversely, the effect of age on perceived psychological impacts was trivial ($\eta^2 = 0.004$), showing that age explained less than 1% of the observed variance. These findings indicate that, although age meaningfully influences perceptions of the causes of marital dissolution, neither gender nor age has substantial practical influence on perceptions of its psychological impacts.

5. DISCUSSION

The finding of the study revealed that married adults attested that domestic violence; infidelity; unresolved conflicts; differences in values and beliefs; and sexual incompatibility are the main causes of marital dissolution. The finding highlights that both severe relationship violations (like violence and cheating) and ongoing compatibility issues (like value differences and sexual incompatibility) can be equally destructive to marital stability. The reason for this finding could be that domestic violence or infidelity introduces emotional and relational challenges that couples may find difficult to overcome which could push them toward dissolution as a means of relief or self-preservation. This finding aligns with a study by Karney, Bradbury and Lavner (2017) revealed that domestic violence remains a primary predictor of marital instability, particularly among younger couples. Levine, Medina and Barrera (2018) found that infidelity is commonly cited as a cause of marital breakdown due to its impact on trust and emotional security. Furthermore, research by Jung and Young (2020) found that value and belief differences contribute to marital conflicts, especially in cross-cultural marriages. Heffner and Lodi-Smith (2019) found sexual incompatibility as a frequent issue leading to dissatisfaction and, ultimately, dissolution in marriages where sexual fulfilment is a key expectation.

The finding of the study further revealed that married adults attested that marital dissolution could make children develop low self-esteem; could create learning difficulty for children; may cause behavioural problems among children; may often cause social stigma; can trigger depression among others. The finding indicates that marital dissolution can have significant negative effects on children, potentially leading to low self-esteem, learning difficulties, behavioural problems, and social stigma. The reasons for these findings may likely stem from the emotional turmoil and instability that children experience during and after marital dissolution, which can lead to feelings of insecurity and inadequacy. This finding supports the study of Sandler, Wolchik, Winslow and Schenck (2019) who found that the cumulative stress from family instability contributes significantly to depressive symptoms in children, as they struggle to cope with changing routines and emotional divides between parents. Similarly, Jackson, Rogers and Sartor (2016) found that children from divorced families showed higher rates of externalizing behaviours, such as aggression and defiance, compared to children from intact families.

Another finding indicates that both male and female married adults perceived the causes of marital dissolution similarly. The reason for the lack of significant gender-based difference could be that both men and women are aware of and affected by similar factors in marital challenges, which may point to a shared understanding of what contributes to the dissolution of marriages. The finding relates to the study of Jackson and Coker (2019) reported that both males and females tend to cite comparable factors as reasons for divorce. In a related study, Oladeji (2019) also established that there was no meaningful gender difference in spouses' perceptions of the determinants of marital satisfaction and marital breakdown in South-western Nigeria.

Finding further revealed that The findings indicated that gender did not significantly influence the psychological effects of marital dissolution among married adults in Oyo State, Nigeria. This implies that both male and female respondents tend to undergo comparable levels of emotional and psychological distress following the end of a marriage. The reason for this finding could be that in contemporary Nigerian society, both men and women invest

significantly in their marriages emotionally, socially, and financially. When these marriages dissolve, both parties face similar challenges in terms of social stigma, family restructuring, and emotional adjustment. The finding relates to the study of Adejumo and Okoiye (2016) who found that Nigerian men and women showed comparable levels of depression and anxiety following divorce, particularly in urban areas. Similarly, Mohammed and Ibrahim (2019) discovered that gender did not significantly influence post-divorce adjustment patterns among adults in Northern Nigeria, with both men and women reporting similar levels of emotional distress and coping challenges.

Another finding revealed that there was significant difference in the causes of marital dissolution as perceived by married adults in Oyo State, Nigeria based on age. This finding suggests that married adults of different age groups have varying perspectives on what leads to marriage breakdown. The result of Scheffe's post-hoc revealed that respondents who were 51 years of age and above contributed more to the significant difference. This could be that older adults, who might have experienced decades of marital dynamics, might view issues like prolonged unresolved conflicts, differences in values and beliefs, or sexual incompatibility as more significant factors. The outcome of this study relates to the study of Agunbiade and Ayotunde (2018) who stated that younger adults emphasize immediate relational issues such as infidelity and communication problems on the issue of marital dissolution, whereas older adults were more concerned with sustained interpersonal and value-based incompatibilities.

Finding also revealed that there was There was no statistically meaningful difference in how married adults in Oyo State, Nigeria perceived the psychological consequences of marital dissolution based on age. This outcome may indicate that the mental and emotional toll of marital dissolution affects individuals similarly across different age groups. This could be that when marital bonds dissolve, it can create a universal emotional void, regardless of whether one is a younger adult dealing with potential changes in plans or an older adult grappling with a sense of late-life upheaval. This universality of emotional distress may explain why age does not notably alter perceptions of psychological impact. The finding supports the study of de Vaus, Gray, Qu and Stanton. (2017) found that the mental health impacts of separation and divorce are pervasive across different age groups, with little variation in emotional strain, life satisfaction reduction, and increased anxiety. Similarly, Amato and Previti (2018) reported that age did not significantly differentiate the psychological outcomes experienced by divorced individuals.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study highlights that married adults in Oyo State perceive domestic violence, infidelity, unresolved conflicts, differences in values and beliefs, and sexual incompatibility as primary causes of marital dissolution. These factors underscore the complexity of marital relationships and the need for interventions that address both relational and individual challenges within marriage. Additionally, married adults recognize that marital dissolution can have profound effects on children, including low self-esteem, learning difficulties, behavioural issues, social stigma, and risk of depression. These insights suggest a

need for support systems and interventions that consider the broader family impacts of marital dissolution, particularly for children's psychological and social well-being.

The study also revealed nuanced perceptions of The study examined the causes and effects of marital dissolution among married adults in relation to demographic characteristics. The results showed that there was no significant variation in respondents' perceptions of the factors responsible for marital breakdown. based on gender, there was a significant difference based on age. This indicates that individuals' perceptions of marital challenges may evolve with life stage and marital experience. Furthermore, perceptions of the psychological impacts of marital dissolution were consistent across gender and age suggesting a uniformity in how the emotional consequences of marital dissolution are experienced across diverse demographic groups. This finding emphasizes the pervasive psychological toll of marital dissolution, regardless of individual differences, highlighting the need for universally accessible mental health support for those experiencing the end of a marital relationship.

Implication for Counselling

The findings of this study have implications for counselling practice. Given that married adults universally recognize issues like domestic violence, infidelity, unresolved conflicts, differences in values and beliefs, and sexual incompatibility as primary causes of marital breakdown, counsellors can focus on pre-marital and marital counselling strategies that address these specific risk factors. By proactively discussing these challenges and offering tools for conflict resolution, empathy-building, and effective communication, counsellors can equip couples with the skills needed to navigate these common causes of marital distress. Additionally, counsellors may incorporate interventions that target stress management and coping strategies to help partners address unresolved conflicts before they escalate into reasons for dissolution.

For children affected by marital dissolution, the reported psychological impacts—including low self-esteem, learning difficulties, behavioural problems, social stigma, and depression—highlight the need for family-focused counselling practices. Child counselling, particularly around divorce or separation, can provide supportive spaces where children learn to process complex emotions, manage stress, and build resilience. Counsellors working with families should prioritize the emotional and social needs of children and consider implementing group therapy sessions for children from divorced families, which could help reduce the effects of social stigma and provide peer support networks. This approach not only aids in building self-esteem and positive behavioural outcomes but also minimizes the likelihood of learning difficulties stemming from emotional distress.

Recommendations

The study recommended the following:

1. Marriage counsellors should organize workshops and counselling sessions focused on conflict resolution, emotional intimacy, and managing differences in values.
2. Marriage counsellors should design child-centered interventions, such as family counselling, to mitigate the psychological impacts on children.
3. Marriage counsellors should develop gender-neutral counselling programs that address common concerns of married adults.

4. Married adults should support one another emotionally during marital challenges, as the psychological impacts affect both genders equally.

5. Marriage counsellors should create age-specific programs to address the unique challenges faced by younger and older couples

6. Married adults of all ages should seek psychological support to cope with the emotional challenges of marital dissolution.

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IMPACT OF PARENT–CHILD RELATIONSHIPS ON THE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE OF ADOLESCENTS AS PERCEIVED BY SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN IBADAN NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The parent-child relationships play a significant role in the well-being of the children. Therefore, this study examined impact of parent–child relationships on the emotional intelligence of adolescents as perceived by secondary school teachers in Ibadan North Local Government, Nigeria. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study is all teachers in Ibadan Metropolis while the target population comprised teachers selected from Ibadan North Local Government. Data were collected using a self-designed questionnaire. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire were established. Data was analysed using Mean, t-test and Analysis of Variance at 0.05 alpha level. The findings of the study revealed that parent-child relationship largely influences the emotional intelligence of adolescents. There were no significant differences found in the teachers' perception of the impact of parent-child relationship on the emotional intelligence of adolescents, on the basis of gender and age. There was a significant difference in the teachers' perception of the impact of parent-child relationship on the emotional intelligence of adolescents based on highest education. Based on this finding, it was recommended that Parents should maintain the warm and supportive interactions with the adolescents.

Keywords: Parent-child Relationship, Emotional Intelligence, Adolescents, Teachers

1. INTRODUCTION

Human beings pass through the developmental stages of infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood. The adolescent stage is generally regarded as a critical period in human development. It is a period of multiple transitions. It is characterised by physical, cognitive, emotional and social changes (Shee, Nayak, D'Souza & Siva, 2025). The physical changes involve the development of secondary sexual characteristics, a rapid growth spurt and an increase in body composition. The increase in body composition is clearly noted in the sharp increase in height and weight (Özdemir, Utkualp & Palloş, 2016). The enlargement of the hips and shoulders is evident. The changes in facial appearance are also observable. The cognitive development includes the ability to reason logically and a deep engagement in complex problem-solving. According to Bobonazarova (2024), the cognitive composition develops when the memory and imagination gain full independence. Adolescents can think

hypothetically and possess the cognition to differentiate the real from many possibilities. They are also capable of criticising many situations. The emotional and social changes similarly grow rapidly. Adolescents experienced intensified mood changes, increased peer relationships, improved self-awareness, a significant sense of self and a search for opposite-gender relationships (Ujuagu & Nwosu, 2025). Adolescents focused on establishing a sense of identity. They are particularly interested in manners of appearing, talking and behaving. They tend to dissociate from parents and socialise with peers (Udom & Udongwo, 2022).

Due to the enormity of these changes, the period necessitates adolescents to develop strong management skills to cope with the storm and stress of the period. One of the major skills to navigate successfully is emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is the ability to identify, comprehend and manage emotions in oneself and respond suitably to the emotions of others. The work of Peter Salovey and John Mayer (1990) gave global recognition to emotional intelligence. The duo described emotional intelligence as the ability to perceive and integrate emotions, to facilitate thoughts and use it to guide actions. Afterwards, Goleman (1995) identified various components of emotional intelligence, which include self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy and social skills.

Based on Goleman's assumption, self-awareness is the ability to recognise one's emotions and use the emotion to make positive decisions. Self-regulation is the ability to control emotions and impulses. It is related to the expression of anger without resulting in conflict, which reduces the feelings of aggression and anxiety. The self-motivation component enables internal drives to achieve success. It assists individuals in focusing on tasks and ultimately improves performance. Empathy competence demonstrates the capacity to feel for others (Singh & Goyal, 2025). It entails feeling others' perspectives and aligning appropriately with society. The social skills aspect further demonstrates the tendency to manage relationships effectively. It entails appreciating social situations and wisely interacting in relationships. These suggest that emotional intelligence may translate to changing the manner to see and interprets situations, altering perception, managing challenges and creating a supportive environment. Emotional intelligence is the key to achieving success in academics, careers, marital and social phases of life. Thus, adolescents with high emotional intelligence are likely to exhibit emotional stability, demonstrate positive interpersonal relationships, and adopt effective communication. Conversely, low emotional intelligence is associated with weak social interaction, poor communication and behavioural difficulties. Manoppo and Kabangunang (2024) stated that adolescents who possess high emotional intelligence would calmly manage emotions, solve problems and overcome challenges in various aspects of life. Reyes-Wapano (2021) further observed that emotional intelligence predicts improved mental health status of adolescents. High emotional intelligence is positively related to well-being and self-esteem and negatively correlated with depression and anxiety (Fernández-Berrocal & Extremera, 2016).

The development of emotional intelligence is not purely hereditary; it is environmentally achieved. It can be learnt, adapted and perfected. The key agent of socialisation is the home, which serves as the foundation for learning. The parent-child relationship is the degree of connectedness between parents and children. Barmola (2014) referred to the parent-child relationship as one of the longest and most lasting social ties that ever exists. Parent-child relationships have unique and enduring characteristics that last

throughout a child's development. According to Nwankwo and Oparaugo (2023), the relationship shapes a child's character. Children learn and practice social and emotional skills based on interactions received from caregivers, specifically, parents. Other caregivers may include teachers and extended family members (Zhu, Dou & Karatzias, 2024). The personality composition of the child is largely dependent on the parent-child relationship. The relationship is usually considered warm, interactive and supportive. A warm relationship helps the children to manage emotions, control behaviour, adjust to situations and help to establish cordial relationships with others. Such a healthy relationship equally assists a child to resolve conflict amicably. The role of parents involves protection, guiding and grooming the cognitive, emotional and social acumen of the children (Nnamani, Idoko, Onuigbo & Eze, 2020). The psychosocial development of the children is ensured through active involvement of the parent (Sylaj & Hajrullahu, 2025). It is achieved by having a close and warm relationship with the children. Such a relationship boosts the emotional intelligence of the children.

The relationship plays a significant role in the social and emotional well-being of the children. The environment and the support received by the children determine the nature of the relationship. Ghita (2023) opined that a secure attachment and emotional connection between parents and adolescents gives the adolescents a positive sense of worth and a high level of emotional intelligence. The parental involvement affects all aspects of adolescent development, which include self-control, self-esteem, self-confidence, self-concept, academic achievement, social adjustment and interpersonal relationships. Sulaiman, Halili, Khalid and Saleh (2017) confirmed that a high positive correlation exists between emotional intelligence and parenting styles. Parents who are emotionally available, regularly provide constructive feedback, and moderately nurture guidance are promoting emotional intelligence in their children. Such children are prepared to meet the children's competencies, autonomy, and relatedness (Gaur & Gupta, 2024). Yang, Ismail, Arshat, Naquiuddin and Azam (2024) pointed out that the parent-child relationship played a significant role in psychosocial functioning, developmental outcomes and various domains of life. It further reiterated that children with high emotional intelligence are shown to be more adaptive and resilient.

The attachment theory of John Bowlby is strong theoretical evidence for this study. The theory suggests that parent-child attachment formed in childhood forms the foundation for emotional regulation and emotional security throughout the life span. It highlights that children are naturally wired to seek emotional support from their parents. When the parents provide love, protection, warmth and companionship, the children receive a secure attachment which supports wellbeing, emotional stability and social functioning. The insecure attachment is generated when parents are neglectful, rejecting and inconsistent in providing companionship. It developed into negative emotional development and poor interpersonal competence. Likewise, the family systems theory of Murray Bowen emphasises the interconnected bonds that exist between the parents and the children. It posits that emotional stability, behavioural patterns, personal growth and development are shaped through interactions with the family system. It assumes that the children's emotional responses and coping strategies largely depend on their interaction with parents. Therefore, based on the assumption of the theory, the parent-child relationship is significant in the

psychological and emotional development of children. The styles adopted by the parents to raise the children have a very strong impact on the overall well-being of the children.

Empirical studies consistently proved that a warm, supportive, positive and friendly parent-child relationship promotes the emotional intelligence of the children. The study of Prabha (2024) conducted in India adopted the mixed methods of survey and interview. The study was conducted among parents and adolescents. It was shown that parenting is positively connected with high emotional intelligence. Orticio et al. (2026) conducted a relationship study to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and parental involvement. The study was conducted among grade 8 students. The result revealed that positive parental involvement predicts high emotional intelligence. Other related studies are the work of Trejo and Jannah (2025), which examined the relationship between parenting styles and emotional intelligence in early childhood. The study employed high school students from Indonesia. It was found that a strong relationship exists between parenting styles and emotional intelligence; however, the level of emotional intelligence depends greatly on the type of parenting adopted. Tahir and Quratulain (2024) studied the relationship between parenting styles, conflict resolution and emotional intelligence. The quantitative study was conducted among young adults and it was found that emotional intelligence was positively associated with parenting styles as well as conflict management skills. Although many studies have been conducted on parent-child relationships, the perception of teachers as a major instrument of socialisation is the main thrust of this study. Therefore, the study investigated the impact of parent-child relationships on the emotional intelligence of adolescents as perceived by secondary school teachers in Ibadan North Local Government, Nigeria.

2. OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESES

The objective of this study was to investigate the impact of parent-child relationships on the emotional intelligence of adolescents as perceived by secondary school teachers in Ibadan North Local Government, Nigeria. The study examined the influence of moderating variables of gender, age and highest level of education on parent-child relationships and emotional intelligence.

2.1 QUESTION

The following research question was raised and answered in this study:

1. What are the impacts of parent-child relationships on the emotional intelligence of adolescents as perceived by secondary school teachers in Ibadan North Local Government, Nigeria?

2.2 HYPOTHESES

The following research hypotheses were formulated and tested:

- There is no significant difference in the impact of parent-child relationships on the emotional intelligence of adolescents as perceived by secondary school teachers in Ibadan North Local Government based on gender.

- There is no significant difference in the impact of parent-child relationships on the emotional intelligence of adolescents as perceived by secondary school teachers in Ibadan North Local Government based on age.
- There is no significant difference in the impact of parent-child relationships on the emotional intelligence of adolescents as perceived by secondary school teachers in Ibadan North Local Government based on highest level of education.

3. METHOD

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population of this study is all teachers in Ibadan Metropolis. The target population comprised teachers selected from Ibadan North Local Government. A multi-stage sampling method was adopted for the study. At stage one, simple random sampling was employed to select Ibadan North Local Government from the existing Local Government Areas in Ibadan Metropolis. At stage two, purposive sampling was used to select senior secondary school teachers in Ibadan North. At stage three, teachers were conveniently sampled from the selected schools in the Local Government. A total of 248 teachers participated in the study. Data were collected from the target sample using a self-designed questionnaire entitled "Impact of Parent-Child Relationship on Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (IPCREIQ)". It was structured on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The scoring points are four, three, two and one, respectively. Based on the used scale, the benchmark is 2.5.

The questionnaire was given to five experts in the Department of Educational Guidance and Counselling, Faculty of Education, University of Ilorin, Nigeria, to establish the validity of the questionnaire. Corrections were adequately taken into consideration in the final draft of the questionnaire. The reliability of IPCREIQ was ascertained using a test-retest reliability method at an interval of four weeks. The results obtained from the two administrations were correlated, and a reliability coefficient of 0.75 was obtained. The selected teachers from Ibadan North LGA completed the questionnaire in a controlled environment. The author, as well as a research assistant, distributed the questionnaire, which was filled out in the teachers' offices. The completed forms were retrieved, and the author proceeded for the data analysis.

The author sought approval from the Heads of Schools selected. Consent of the teachers was also obtained to identify those who were willing to participate. Afterwards, the author briefly explained the objectives of the study to the participants. They were guided on how to answer the questionnaire. They were instructed not to indicate their names, address or any form of identity to maintain anonymity. They were assured that after the completion of the analysis, the questionnaire forms would be confidentially disposed of in compliance with ethical standards. Data was analysed with statistical software. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyse the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Inferential statistics was adopted to analyse the hypotheses formulated at 0.05 level of significance.

4. RESULTS

Demographic Data

This section presents the results of the demographic data obtained from the respondents in frequency and percentages.

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Respondents based on Demographic Variables

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	98	39.5
Female	150	60.5
Total	248	100.0
Age		
18-27 years	49	19.8
28-37 years	63	25.4
38-47 years	89	35.9
48 -57 years	35	14.1
58 years and above	12	4.8
Total	248	100.0
Highest Level of Education		
NCE/ND	35	14.1
HND/BSC	123	49.6
Master's	57	23.0
PhD	33	13.3
Total	248	100.0

Table 1 shows the distribution of demographic data of the respondents. The table reveals that the demographic variables used for this study are gender, age and highest level of qualification of the teachers.

Research Question One: What are the impacts of parent-child relationships on the emotional intelligence of adolescents, as perceived by secondary school teachers in Ibadan North Local Government?

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation and Rank Order showing the of impacts of parent-child relationships on the emotional intelligence of adolescents

S/N	ITEMS	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
1	Students with a strong emotional bond with their parents display better self-awareness in the classroom.	3.62	.71528	1 st
15	Students with emotionally available parents are more likely to seek help when facing challenges.	3.38	.69296	2 nd
5	Children who frequently engage in positive discussions with their parents are more socially confident.	3.36	.70089	3 rd
14	Parental reinforcement contributes to a student's ability to manage frustration in difficult tasks.	3.36	.71801	4 th

9	Students from households with emotional warmth and guidance tend to be more motivated in academic tasks.	3.36	.76635	5 th
13	Students whose parents dismiss their emotions tend to struggle with emotional regulation in school.	3.35	.73236	6 th
3	A warm and supportive parent-child relationship enhances a student's ability to empathize with others.	3.34	.72422	7 th
12	A secure parent-child attachment helps students cope with academic pressure more effectively.	3.33	.75967	8 th
7	Students with parents who encourage emotional expression show better adaptability to new situations.	3.30	.73192	9 th
6	Students raised in friendly family environments handle conflicts with peers more constructively.	3.29	.71965	10 th
11	Students from strict homes often struggle with expressing their emotions in a healthy way.	3.28	.79930	11 th
10	Students who receive consistent emotional support from their parents exhibit better self-control.	3.27	.66258	12 th
4	Children who experience consistent parental support demonstrate higher levels of emotional intelligence in social interactions.	3.21	.77541	13 th
2	Students who have open communication with their parents tend to manage their emotions effectively.	3.20	.75801	14 th
8	Overprotective parenting limits a student's ability to develop emotional resilience.	2.99	.89981	15 th

Table 2 presents the mean and rank order of the teachers' perception on impacts of parent-child relationships on the emotional intelligence of adolescents. From the table above, it can be said that positive and warm parent-child relationships promote the emotional intelligence of adolescents.

Hypothesis One: *There is no significant difference in the impact of parent-child relationship on the emotional intelligence of adolescents as perceived by secondary school teachers in Ibadan North LG, based on gender.*

Table 3: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value of the Teachers' Perception on the impact of parent-child relationship on emotional intelligence of adolescents based on gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. value	t- value	Crit. value	p-value
Male	98	49.4330	3.51457	246	.809	1.650		.419
Female	150	49.7933	3.35244					

Table 3 shows that there was no significant difference in teachers' perceptions of the impact of parent-child relationship on adolescents' emotional intelligence based on gender, $t(246)=0.81$, $p = .419$, Cohen's $d=0.11$, indicating a negligible effect size. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained.

Hypothesis Two: *There is no significant difference in the impact of parent-child relationship on emotional intelligence of adolescents as perceived by secondary school teachers in Ibadan North LG, based on age*

Table 4: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing the Teachers' Perception on the impact of parent-child relationship on the emotional intelligence of adolescents based on age

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	Calc. F-ratio	Crit. F-ratio	p-value
Between Groups	44.885	4	11.221	.966	2.41	.427
Within Groups	2823.595	243	11.620			
Total	2868.480	247				

A one-way ANOVA showed no statistically significant difference among age groups, $F(4, 243) = 0.97, p = .427, \eta^2 = .016$, indicating a small effect size.

Hypothesis Three: *There is no significant difference in the impact of parent-child relationship on emotional intelligence of adolescents as perceived by secondary school teachers in Ibadan North LG based on highest level of education*

Table 5: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing the Teachers' Perception on the impact of parent-child relationship on emotional intelligence of adolescents as perceived by teachers based on highest level of education

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	Calc. F-ratio	Crit. F-ratio	p-value
Between Groups	109.692	3	36.564	3.234	2.64	.023
Within Groups	2758.788	244	11.307			
Total	2868.480	247				

A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference according to educational qualification, $F(3, 244) = 3.23, p = .023, \eta^2 = .038$, indicating a small effect size. The null hypothesis was rejected. In order to ascertain where the difference lies, Duncan Post-Hoc analysis was conducted and the result is shown on the table below.

Table 6: Duncan Post-Hoc Showing the Difference in the impact of parent-child relationship on emotional intelligence of adolescents as perceived by teachers based on highest level of education.

Highest Level of Edu.	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
PhD	33	49.1515	
HND/BSC	123	49.1545	
Master's	57	50.2807	50.2807
NCE/ND	35		50.8286
Sig.		.125	.429

Since the mean score of those who had NCE/ND is higher than the mean of other age groups, this indicates that respondents who had NCE/ND are responsible for the difference observed.

5. DISCUSSION

The finding revealed that the parent-child relationship largely influences the emotional intelligence of adolescents. The results showed that all the items ranked above the benchmark of 2.5. This implies the items are strong indicators of the variables. This finding might not be surprising as a result of the natural evidence, theoretical backings and empirical supports that justify the positive and strong relationship that exists between parent-child and emotional intelligence. The finding corroborates Shee, Nayak, D'Souza and Siva (2025), who found that the parent-child relationship correlates with emotional intelligence. This finding supports Manoppo and Kabangunang (2024), who also found that parenting patterns have significant links with emotional intelligence. Prabha (2024) similarly aligns with this finding; the submission noted that parenting shapes the emotional intelligence of adolescents. The interaction of the parents and their children reveals a connection that has implications for well-being and emotional development.

The result of hypothesis one showed that there is no significant difference between male and female teachers' perceptions of the impact of parent-child relationship on the emotional intelligence of adolescents. The finding is in line with Ujuagu and Nwosu (2025), who found no significant gender difference in the emotional intelligence of adolescents. This finding agrees with Ruiz and Esteban (2018), who found no gender differences in the emotional intelligence of adolescents. This finding may suggest that male and female teachers perceived emotional intelligence has been developed through interpersonal experiences with parents, family and environment. The pattern of attachment, communication and empathy encourages emotional development of adolescents.

The finding of hypothesis two revealed that no significant difference was found in the teachers' perception of the impact of parent-child relationship on the emotional intelligence of adolescents, on the basis of age. The teachers in Ibadan North LG, irrespective of their age, agree that parent-child relationships strongly influence the emotional intelligence of adolescents. This agrees with the submission of Lahore and Nazly (2021), which found that teachers across different ages accepted that relationships affect emotional intelligence.

The result of hypothesis three indicated a significant difference in the teachers' perception of the impact of parent-child relationship on the emotional intelligence of adolescents on the basis of highest level of education. The study of Arteaga-Cedeño, Carbonero-Martín, Martín-Antón & Molinero-González (2022) agreed with this study that professional qualifications affect emotional perceptions. Educational exposure may affect the thoughts and opinions of teachers. The experiences and orientation gained through education influence perceptions and shape the pattern of behaviour.

6. CONCLUSION

This study established strong interactions between parents, children and emotional intelligence. It demonstrated that parents' attachment, communication and encouragement affect the adolescents' emotional awareness and regulation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that:

1. Parents should maintain the warm and supportive interactions with the adolescents. The interactions should equally be improved upon to boost the emotional intelligence of the adolescents.
2. Seminars and workshops should be organized for parents to learn more skills on healthy emotional practices.
3. Professional counsellors should organize counselling sessions for parents and adolescents on emotional regulation and management.
4. Parents should be encouraged to learn different parenting styles and adopt the best practices.
5. Educational authorities should organize emotional trainings for teachers to complement the parenting practices.

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CULTURAL AND PERSONALITY INFLUENCES ON ATTITUDES TOWARD THE 'BABY MAMA' SYNDROME AMONG YOUTHS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the role of cultural and personality dimensions on attitudes towards the baby mama syndrome among final year students at the University of Lagos (UNILAG). A purposive sampling technique was used to select 383 participants (147 males and 236 females) from nine faculties. The instruments employed included the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, the Big Five Inventory, and the Attitude Towards Baby Mama Syndrome Scale. Utilizing a cross-sectional survey design, the data were analyzed using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), T-tests, and multiple regression through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The results indicated that family background significantly predicted attitudes towards the baby mama syndrome [$F_{(4, 378)}=16.57$; $p<.01$]. Specifically, the family support dimension of social support was a significant predictor of baby mama syndrome anxiety ($\beta=-.29$, $p<.01$). Additionally, the personality dimensions of extraversion ($\beta=.13$, $p<.05$), conscientiousness ($\beta=-.13$, $p<.05$), and neuroticism ($\beta=.31$, $p<.01$) significantly predicted attitudes towards the baby mama syndrome. The study also found that males reported more positive attitudes towards the baby mama syndrome compared to females. The findings were discussed in relation to existing literature, with limitations acknowledged and suggestions for future research provided. Implications were drawn for research, societal understanding, academic discourse, and family dynamics.

Keywords: Baby Mama Syndrome, Social Support, Personality, Family Background

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In traditional African societies, the idea of having children outside marriage is frowned upon and individuals who find themselves in that situation are often stigmatized because women are expected to attain a certain age and become married before having sex (Budu et al., 2023). However, in Nigeria, the decisions taken by young adults in sexuality might be said to be changing. Many are likely now disassociating from getting into long tied marital union and this may be a result from the enculturation of a diffused western culture

(Umukoro, 2025). Rather than the regrets, teenagers now take pleasure having children out of wedlock as long as it raises prestige and status to stardom; not the companionship but the financial gains for having children for men with a high standard of living (Ifeagwazi et al, 2014). Concerns may be tailored in this direction to understand the reasons behind this change in the pattern of sexuality. Research studies (Clark & Hamplova, 2013) have shown that approximately 50% of women from Sub-Saharan Africa have a high possibility of becoming single mothers following divorce or spousal death. There also seems to be an increasing trend of unwed young mothers popularly known as baby mamas.

Like other nations in sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria is witnessing continuous increase in motherhood outside marriage due to marital breakdowns, widowhood, or by choice. These have created a vast number of single mothers providing for their families all over the nation. This is further worsened by the fact that numerous celebrities such as Innocent Idibia popularly known as 2Baba, Ayomide Balogun popularly known as Wizkid, and David Adeleke popularly known as Davido all boast of numerous baby mamas. This has made the phenomenon of baby mama seem acceptable and even appealing to young females. It is in this light that Adejojo, et al. (2022) opined that today many young people are getting pregnant out of wedlock and it is even celebrated by the media. According to Adejoh et al. (2019), the idea of having children outside marriage is seen by some ladies as a way to gain financial support, publicity, and a way to being a parent without dealing with marital commitment. Adejojo et al. (2022) also observed that a lot of young people have been caught in this web with the belief that a woman or man's "independence" is derived from having babies without any marital attachment.

The problem of being or having a baby mama is characterized by a variety of psychological, economical, social and legal factors which may in turn affect the baby mama, the baby daddy, the child or children as well as the society as a whole. According to National Vital Statistics Reports (Martin et al., 2009), the birth rate among unmarried women is mostly seen in the age group of 20-24 years followed by women who are between the ages of 25-29 years and finally 18-19 years with more than 50% of the births taking place among unmarried women aged in their early twenties. According to UN Population Fund (2013), in the case of developing nations alone, there are approximately 7.3 million young girls below 18 years of age giving birth annually, of which 2 million are under the age of 15 years. As stated during the World Population day held in 2013, 44.5 million female Nigerian within the age group 10-24 years had become pregnant (Onwumere, 2019).

1.2 The Baby Mama Syndrome

The 'baby mama' syndrome is a combination of several factors including individuals, relations, actions, and negative outcomes in any manner connected to two individuals who conceive a child without being married to one another (Adejojo et al., 2022). As reported by Donogaga (2016), baby mama syndrome from an African perspective is a combination of a baby mama, a baby daddy, their respective biological families, in-laws, other baby mamas and baby daddies who have 'ties' to the baby mama or baby daddy, friends, the police, the courts, society, taxpayers, and most importantly, the child. This is because marital relations within typical African societies extends beyond the couple and includes their immediate and

extended families. The baby mama syndrome also encompasses any actions performed by these individuals and organizations which will not occur if the child had not come into existence (Donogaga, 2016). The baby mama syndrome begins when two unmarried individuals conceive a child, and can involve housing, employment, and lifestyle issues (Donogaga, 2016); this highlights the involvement of family in baby mama issues.

The cultural dimension of the family in relation to the baby mama syndrome is therefore of interest to this study; with specific interest in the family background from which individuals are raised. For the purpose of this study, only the family types will be taken into consideration and they include; the single parent family, dual parent family, polygamous family, extended family and foster family. Indeed, the family dynamic does affect the thought process of the child. The values of the family, the family interactions, and the coping mechanisms practiced by the family do influence how the child thinks about himself and his surroundings (Umukoro & Okurame, 2017). Often, being a single parent comes hand in hand with struggling financially. Financial stress in the household has been shown to affect parents psychologically, thus making them less empathic towards their children (Dearing, McCartney & Taylor, 2006). In a study conducted by Azuka-Obieke (2013), he noted that single-parent families are most likely to belong to the lower socioeconomic group. In a study conducted by Sigle-Rushton and McLanahan (2002), where the concern was the welfare of the child in a household without one parent, they concluded that children who grow up with only one parent fare poorly in many ways compared to those growing up with both parents.

One other cultural component to consider in the current study is social support. Social support refers to the perceived and/or real sense that someone cares, can provide help in times of need, and that they have some form of support network among other people around them. It is defined by the act where an individual receives aid from someone else or through their network and results in an immediate or delayed positive response to the aid (Umukoro & Akinade, 2018). Though the definitions may differ across the literature on social support, it appears that everyone agrees that social support includes tangible and intangible resources; the former includes financial and physical support while the latter includes guidance and encouragement in times of crisis (Cohen, Underwood & Gottlieb, 2000). Perceived social support, which is based on the idea that individuals will receive help, find it helpful and fulfilling if they were to need it, is known to act as a protector of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral functioning during times of distress (Lakey & Orehek, 2011). According to Fergus and Zimmerman (2005), more and more research suggests that social support acts as a resilient factor in significant events in life such as teenage pregnancy. For example, social support appeared to buffer the impact of trauma exposure in sexual abuse victims (Schumm, Briggs-Phillips, & Hobfoll, 2006).

Could personality also be implicated in the baby mama syndrome? Personality is and has been a well-defined concept in the field of psychology. Cote et al. (2008) defines personality as the characteristic way of thinking, feeling, and behaving that makes a person different from another person. According to Costa and McCrae (1992), personality can be grouped into five clusters; conscientiousness (reliability, conventionality, industriousness), neuroticism (emotional stability), extraversion, openness (intellectual curiosity, appreciation for art, imagination) and agreeableness. From logical perspectives, personality can indeed play a role in how individuals perceive and potentially engage with the concept of the baby

mama syndrome. Personality traits such as openness to experience, conscientiousness, and neuroticism can influence one's attitudes towards unconventional family structures like the baby mama syndrome. For instance, individuals high in openness may be more accepting of non-traditional family arrangements, while those high in conscientiousness might prioritize stability and conventional family structures. Personality traits may also influence behavior related to relationships and family dynamics. Traits like extraversion may impact how individuals form and maintain relationships, potentially influencing their likelihood of becoming involved in situations related to the baby mama syndrome. Personality traits may further affect how individuals cope with the challenges and responsibilities associated with the baby mama syndrome.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

2.1 Theoretical Framework

It is necessary to note that the principles of social norms theory play a critical role in defining the changing linkages in the study under discussion. A social norm or norm refers to a commonly held standard defining appropriate behavior in the group. Social norms may refer to either a common understanding that dictates behavior among the members of society or may be codified in rules and laws (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). Social normative influences or social norms, are considered to be very effective motivational factors in driving the behavior of people and systematically developed and incorporated into key theories of human behavior. The Social Norms Theory has been formulated in the 1980s-1990s by Perkins and Berkowitz (1986). Social Norms Theory is behavioral in nature and provides a framework explaining the relationship between individual actions and perceptions regarding other people's actions and approvals. In order to incorporate Social Norms Theory into this research, it is useful to conceptualize attitudes toward the "baby mama syndrome" as socially constructed perspectives influenced by the perceptions of others' thoughts and actions about the topic under investigation. In this case, social support, family dynamics, and personality will not remain separate phenomena since they interact in the process of learning and implementing certain norms.

Based on the above assumptions, Social Norms Theory will offer an integrated approach to the investigation of relationships between social support, family dynamics, and personality as determinants of attitudes toward the "baby mama syndrome." Social support groups (specifically friends, members of religious organizations, significant others) are viewed as primary referent groups responsible for communicating and reinforcing descriptive and injunctive norms; thus, individuals tend to share perspectives typical for their social network members (Berkowitz, 2004; Lapinski & Rimal, 2005). Concurrently, family interactions form the core setting for the process of internalizing social norms as far as beliefs regarding sex, marriage, and child bearing are concerned, thus exerting an influence on their future behaviors (Kincaid, 2004; Rimal & Real, 2005). Yet, whether or not social norms will be accepted will greatly depend upon the personality of the individual since personal characteristics will play a role in determining his/her responsiveness to social approval, peer pressure and willingness to conform to other forms of life (McCrae & Costa, 2003). In light of this, within the scope of social norms, attitudes towards "baby mama syndrome" can be

conceptualized as the interaction among three key factors: social norms established in families, social support that influences beliefs, and personality traits.

2.2 Empirical Review

Adejo et al. (2022) examined Nigerian youths' knowledge of the 'baby mama' concept and their views on its acceptability. Using a qualitative approach, 40 participants aged 16 to 40 from educational institutions in Oyo State were involved. Findings showed that knowledge and perceptions stemmed from celebrity gossip on social media and personal or familial experiences. Many youths opposed the 'baby mama' family system due to reasons like religion, socialization, and its impact on child development. Akanbi et al. (2021) investigated the relationship between family background and teenage pregnancy in Nigeria, using data from 8448 pregnant teenage females aged 15 to 19, extracted from the 2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey. Analysis revealed that the poorest family background significantly predicted teenage pregnancy. Azuka-Obieke (2013) studied single-parenting's impact on adolescents' psychological well-being and academic performance in Lagos. Using a sample of 100 participants from five secondary schools, the study found that adolescents benefitted psychologically and academically from an orderly and nurturing home provided by both parents.

Bałanda-Bałdyga, Pilewska-Kozak, and Dobrowolska (2022) explored the relationship between social support and attitudes towards pregnancy and childbirth among 308 adolescent mothers in Poland. Using convenience sampling, the study found no significant relationship between overall social support and attitudes towards pregnancy and childbirth. Begun et al. (2020) examined the relationship between social support and pro-pregnancy attitudes among 1003 homeless youths in the USA. Findings showed that youths receiving instrumental support from serious partners were more likely to endorse pro-pregnancy attitudes. Cairney et al. (2003) analyzed the effect of stress and social support on the relationship between single parent status and depression, using secondary data from the 1994–95 National Population Health Survey. The study found that single mothers reported lower levels of perceived social support and social involvement than married mothers. Muarifah et al. (2019) investigated social support's effect on single mothers' subjective well-being in Indonesia. Using a correlational research method with 150 single mothers, findings revealed that social support significantly affected their subjective well-being.

Ghani et al. (2014) examined the relationship between parenting style and adolescents' personality profiles in single-mother families. The study found that authoritative parenting was the most practiced style, and agreeableness was the most dominant personality trait. Harville, Madkour, and Xie (2014) explored the relationship between personality and adolescent pregnancy outcomes in the USA, involving 6529 girls. Findings indicated that agreeableness and intellect/imagination reduced the likelihood of teenage pregnancy, while neuroticism, conscientiousness, and extraversion increased it. Shrestha et al. (2021) examined the attitudes of adolescent girls towards teenage pregnancy in Nepal, involving 334 students. The study found that 58.1% had a favorable attitude, believing teenage pregnancy was wrong. Awopetu et al. (2013) studied gender differences in attitudes towards teenage pregnancy among 286 adolescents in Makurdi. Findings showed significant differences between male and female attitudes and perceptions of teenage pregnancy. DeJean et al. (2012) investigated

attitudes towards never-married single fathers and mothers, finding that participants viewed single fathers more positively than single mothers

The meta-analysis of 194 studies revealed that Conscientiousness correlated with a decreased probability of engaging in risky sex (Bogg & Roberts 2004); Neuroticism was also positively associated with unhealthy behaviors, such as risky sexual practices and exercise (Hoyle et al. 2000, Rhodes & Smith 2006); and agreeableness was positively associated with healthy behavior, including low-risk sex (Hoyle et al. 2000). With regard to the relationship between personality traits and unintended pregnancies, some studies (e.g. Bouchard 2005, Berg et al. 2013) indicate that unintended pregnancy was associated with high neuroticism and low agreeableness and conscientiousness. In addition, Harville, Madkour and Xie (2014), in their study, discovered that agreeableness and intellect/imagination had negative correlation with the probability of becoming pregnant during adolescence, whereas neuroticism, conscientiousness and extraversion positively correlated with the same probability.

2.3 Hypotheses

In line with the study's objectives, and drawing on established theoretical propositions and empirical patterns, the following hypotheses are proposed to guide the direction of the analysis.

H₁: Family background will significantly influence attitude towards 'baby mama' syndrome among finalists in University of Lagos.

H₂: Social support will significantly influence attitude towards 'baby mama' syndrome among finalists in University of Lagos.

H₃: Personality dimensions will significantly influence attitude towards 'baby mama' syndrome among finalists in University of Lagos

H₄: Females will show a more positive attitude towards 'baby mama' syndrome among finalists in University of Lagos.

3. METHOD

3.1 Study Design

The target population for this study comprised final year undergraduate students at the University of Lagos. This population is of specific interest because of the generally known and factual assumption that they are transitioning from school into the real world, and as such, coupled with the differences in their personalities, experiences and cultural backgrounds, they are able to form opinions resulting in varying attitudes towards the baby mama phenomenon. A descriptive survey research design was employed for this study as it ensures that the data collected represented the target population and can be generalized to a larger population. The sample size used consisted of final year students in the university comprising both male and female ranging from adolescents to emerging adults who were randomly selected. Based on the cost, time and convenience of collecting data, this research study adopted the Taro Yamane method in obtaining a sample size of 383 participants for the

study. Purposive sampling process was used to select the study participants from a cohort of final year students at the University of Lagos.

3.2 Measures

A standardized questionnaire was used to obtain data from the study participants. The questionnaire was structured into 4 sections; the first section contained the demographic information of the respondents which included gender, age, level of education, religion, faculty and family type. The other sections are described below:

- *Big Five Inventory (BFI)*: The Big Five Inventory (BFI) was formulated by John, Donahue, and Kentle in 1991. BFI refers to self-report questionnaire tool designed to assess individual differences on five broad personality traits such as: Openness to experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism. BFI contains 44 items that are answered based on a scale of 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1(Strongly agree)to 5 (strongly disagree).

- *Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)*: This scale was formulated by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet and Farley (1988) in adult sample population. The test is widely used across cultures to evaluate perceptions of social support (Canty-Mitchell & Zimet, 2000; Chou, 2000). Studies have shown MSPSS test is less prone to social desirability biases (Dahlem, Zimet & Walker, 1991). There are 12-items in the MSPSS scale measuring social support from family members, friends, and significant other groups. Sample items on the scale include, “I get the emotional help and support I need from my family”, “I can count on my Friends when things go wrong”, “There is a special person who is around when am in need”. Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet and Farley (1988) reported a Cronbach’s alpha of .82 while Ifeagwazi, et al. (2014) obtained a Cronbach’s alpha of .67 for the MSPSS.

- *Baby Mama Syndrome Attitude Scale (BMSAS)*: Due to the apparent lack of an existing standardized scale for the measurement of the attitude towards baby mama syndrome, the baby mama syndrome attitude scale was developed by the researcher. The development of the Baby Mama Syndrome Attitude Scale (BMSAS) followed a systematic and multi-stage process grounded in established psychometric principles for scale construction.

3.3 Scale Development of the BMSAS

Conceptualization and Item Generation

Stage one consisted of operationalizing the construct of interest (attitude toward baby mama syndrome). This step was facilitated by using the tri-partite theory, where attitudes are seen as constructs made up of three components: cognitive (knowledge), affective (emotions) and behavioral (intentions). From the literature review on family structure, non-marital childbirth, celebrity culture, and society’s perception about baby mamas, the researcher defined the construct by specifying the domains that would be covered by the scale. Having specified the conceptual domain of the attitude towards the baby mama syndrome, a list of potential items was created. This step entailed listing the possible items that would measure the cognitive, affective and behavioral components of attitude as described above. The selected items took into account all dimensions, from society norms and knowledge to

emotions and intentions regarding the baby mamas. The total number of items generated at this stage was higher than the intended number for the final scale.

Scale Validation and Structure

To further improve the quality and relevance of the items, the initial draft was validated through face validation. A sample of people in the general population was selected to validate the test in terms of readability and comprehensibility of the items. On this basis, some changes were introduced in terms of wording and phrasing. Next, the test went under content validation by an expert group. These experts provided their assessment of each item in terms of its relevance to the construct domains, the representativeness of the construct domains and overall sufficiency of the item to cover all aspects of the construct domain. The result of this phase was some revision and elimination of some items. In this way, all the dimensions of the construct were appropriately represented. As a result, the final questionnaire included 13 items in total: five in the cognitive component of attitude, four in the affective component, and four in the behavioral component. Responses were obtained on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." This format was selected to allow for gradation in responses and to capture the intensity of participants' attitudes.

Pilot Testing

The pilot study was performed to determine initial psychometric properties of the scale. The pilot study consisted of 40 final year students enrolled at the faculty of Social Sciences, who were excluded from further participation in the main study. This procedure was important for highlighting any possible problems associated with clarity of the questions, reliability of the scale, as well as administration process itself. Data collected in the pilot study were analyzed to estimate internal consistency reliability through Cronbach's alpha test. The resulting reliability coefficient was calculated at 0.712, meaning that the new scale possessed an adequate level of internal consistency. This indicated that items within the scale were highly correlated, measuring one construct effectively. After the scale was revised according to results of the pilot study, the final version of the BMSAS was administered among the participants of the main study. In order to prove construct validity of the scale, the researcher checked the correlation between the measure under investigation and other constructs theoretically linked to the concept under study. The final version of the measurement scale was administered to the study participants.

Final Items for Baby Mama Syndrome Attitude Scale (BMSAS)

S/N	Items
1.	The thought of being (or having) a baby mama is offensive.
2.	The Baby Mama syndrome should be encouraged by our society.
3.	Being (or having) a baby mama adds value to the status of celebrities in our society.
4.	Having a baby out of wedlock is a stain on one's reputation.
5.	As long as there is financial stability, the baby mama status is acceptable.
6.	I would not mind being (or having) a baby mama.
7.	I have an admiration for celebrity baby mamas in our society.

8.	I feel that having a child is more important than being married.
9.	I feel the baby mama relationship is ideal for our society.
10.	I would never want to be/have a baby mama.
11.	I would rather be/have a baby mama than endure a toxic marriage.
12.	If I have my way, I would be/have a baby mama.
13.	I have plans to be/have a baby mama.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

An ethical approval for the study was obtained from the University of Lagos Ethical Review Board (UNILAGREC). The questionnaires were distributed among final-year students across ten different faculties within the University. Prior to distribution, respondents were thoroughly briefed on the purpose of the study and the importance of their cooperation. It was emphasized that the research was purely for academic purposes and that their responses would be kept confidential. Respondents were allotted 10-15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. This time frame was intended to provide respondents with adequate time to thoughtfully consider the questionnaire items, thereby facilitating valid, reliable, and honest responses. The researcher administered the questionnaires and remained on-site to collect them on the same day from each faculty until the process was complete. This approach ensured a high response rate and the immediate retrieval of completed questionnaires. The data collected from this study were analyzed using both inferential and descriptive statistics. Specifically, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed to test Hypothesis 1, multiple regression analyses were utilized for Hypotheses 2 and 3, and a T-test was applied to test Hypothesis 4. All hypotheses were tested at a significance level of 0.05.

4. RESULTS

Hypothesis One: Family background will significantly influence attitude towards ‘baby mama’ syndrome among finalists in University of Lagos. This was tested using One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and the result is presented in Table 1a

Table 1a: One-Way ANOVA summary table showing results on the influence of family background on attitude towards baby mama syndrome

Source	SS	Df	MS	F	p	η^2
Between Groups	3800.31	4	950.08	16.57	< .01	.15
Within Groups	21678.98	378	57.35			
Total	25479.29	382				

DV: Attitude towards Baby Mama Syndrome

Table 1a presents results on the influence of family background on attitude to baby mama syndrome. It is shown that family background had a significant influence on attitude towards baby mama syndrome among University students [$F_{(4,378)} = 16.57$; $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .15$]. In addition to statistical significance, the effect size was examined to determine the practical importance of this finding. The eta-squared ($\eta^2 = .15$) indicates that family background accounted for approximately 15% of the variance in attitude towards the baby mama

syndrome. Based on Cohen's (1988) conventions for interpreting effect sizes (small = .01, medium = .06, large = .14), this represents a large effect, suggesting that family background is not only a statistically significant but also a practically meaningful predictor of attitude towards the baby mama syndrome among the study participants. Further post hoc analyses are presented on Table 1b;

Table 1b: Post-Hoc and descriptive analysis of family background on attitude towards baby mama syndrome

SN	Family background	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
1	Single parent	-					40.79	7.41
2	Dual family parent	5.46*	-				35.33	7.82
3	Polygamous family	2.47	7.93*	-			43.26	6.91
4	Extended family	2.12	3.34	4.60	-		38.67	8.26
5	Foster family	1.29	4.17	3.76	.83	-	39.50	17.68

Table 1b presents the post-hoc and descriptive analysis of family background on attitudes towards the 'baby mama' syndrome, showing the means and standard deviations (SD) for attitudes based on different family backgrounds. The table also includes the results of post-hoc comparisons, indicating statistically significant differences (marked with *) between specific groups. Results shows that the highest significant mean difference in attitude towards baby mama syndrome was observed between polygamous and dual family parents (MD = 7.93; $p < .05$). The highest positive attitude towards baby mama syndrome was observed among students from polygamous family (Mean = 43.26; SD = 6.91), and single parent homes (Mean = 40.79; SD = 7.41), while the least positive attitude towards baby mama syndrome was observed among students from dual family (Mean = 35.33; SD = 7.82). The results imply that individuals from single-parent families have a significantly more favorable attitude towards the 'baby mama' syndrome compared to those from dual-family parent backgrounds; while individuals from polygamous families have a significantly more favorable attitude towards the 'baby mama' syndrome compared to those from dual-family parent backgrounds. The hypothesis stated is therefore accepted.

Hypothesis Two: Social support will significantly influence attitude towards 'baby mama' syndrome among finalists in University of Lagos. This was tested using multiple regression analysis and the result is presented on Table 2.

Table 2 presents results on the joint and independent influence of the dimensions of social support (support from significant others, family support and friends support) on attitude towards baby mama syndrome among university students. It is shown that the dimensions of social support (support from significant others, family support and friends support) had significant joint influence on attitude towards baby mama syndrome [$R = .23$; $R^2 = .05$; $F(3, 379) = 6.71$; $p < .01$]. Collectively, the dimensions of social support accounted for about 5% variance in the attitude towards baby mama syndrome. However, only family support ($\beta = -.29$; $t = -4.30$; $p < .01$) had an independent influence on attitude towards baby mama syndrome. Direction of the beta value shows that the higher the family support ($\beta = -$

.29), the lower the positive attitude towards baby mama syndrome. The hypothesis stated is therefore accepted.

Table 2: Multiple regression summary table showing results on the influence of social support on attitude towards baby mama syndrome

Predictors	B	T	P	R	R ²	F	p
Significant others	.09	1.39	> .05				
Family support	-.29	-4.30	< .01	.23	.05	6.71	< .01
Friends support	.09	1.52	> .05				

Hypothesis Three: Personality dimensions will significantly influence attitude towards ‘baby mama’ syndrome among finalists in University of Lagos. This was tested using multiple regression analysis and the result is presented on Table 3.

Table 3: Multiple regression summary table showing results on the influence of personality traits on attitude towards baby mama syndrome

Predictors	β	T	p	R	R ²	F	p
Openness	-.11	-1.54	> .05				
Agreeableness	-.09	-1.36	> .05				
Extraversion	.13	2.58	< .05	.49	.24	23.58	< .01
Conscientiousness	-.13	-2.06	< .05				
Neuroticism	.31	4.96	< .01				

Table 3 presents results on the joint and independent influence of the personality traits (openness to experience, agreeableness, extraversion, conscientiousness and neuroticism) on attitude towards baby mama syndrome among university students. It is shown that personality traits (openness to experience, agreeableness, extraversion, conscientiousness and neuroticism) had significant joint influence on attitude towards baby mama syndrome [$R=.49$; $R^2=.24$; $F_{(5, 375)}=23.58$; $p<.01$]. Collectively, personality traits (openness to experience, agreeableness, extraversion, conscientiousness and neuroticism) accounted for about 24% variance in the attitude towards baby mama syndrome. However, only extraversion ($\beta=.13$; $t=2.58$; $p<.05$), conscientiousness ($\beta=-.13$; $t=2.06$; $p<.05$) and neuroticism ($\beta=.31$; $t=4.96$; $p<.01$) had independent influence on attitude towards baby mama syndrome. Direction of the beta value shows that the higher the extraversion ($\beta=.13$) and neuroticism ($\beta=.31$), the higher the positive attitude towards baby mama syndrome, while the higher the conscientiousness ($\beta=-.13$), the lower the positive attitude towards baby mama syndrome.

Hypothesis Four: Females will show a more positive attitude towards ‘baby mama’ syndrome among finalists in University of Lagos. This was tested using t-test for independent samples and the result is presented on Table 4 below.

Table 4: T-test for independent samples summary table showing results on gender differences in attitude towards baby mama syndrome

Gender	N	Mean	SD	T	df	p
Male	147	40.17	7.64	2.53	381	< .05
Female	236	38.01	8.39			

Table 4 presents results on gender differences in attitude towards baby mama syndrome among University students. It is shown that there exists significant gender differences in attitude towards baby mama syndrome [$t(381) = 2.53$; $p < .05$]. Further, males reported more favorable attitudes towards baby mama syndrome ($\bar{x} = 40.17$; $SD = 7.64$) than their female counterparts ($\bar{x} = 38.01$; $SD = 8.39$). The hypothesis stated is therefore accepted.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 DISCUSSION

The study revealed that family background had a significant influence on attitude towards baby mama syndrome. Thus, the first hypothesis which stated that family background will significantly influence attitude towards baby mama syndrome was accepted. This finding is supported by previous findings such as Akanbi et al. (2021) which found a positive relationship between family background and being a baby mama. This finding is in consonance with the study by Adejo et al. (2022) who found that family background did have an influence on the attitude towards ‘baby mama’ phenomenon among the youths. Adejo et al. (2022) also found that experience through personal and/or family members did have an influence on the knowledge and perception of the ‘baby mama’ phenomenon among the youths. The finding from this study is not inconsistent to any study according to the knowledge of the researcher.

Specifically, the study revealed that respondents from polygamous homes held the most positive attitudes toward the baby mama syndrome. This finding can be explained through contemporary perspectives on socialization and family diversity, which emphasize that individuals’ attitudes are shaped by the relational contexts in which they are raised. Children growing up in polygamous households are often exposed to multiple maternal figures and extended kinship systems, which may normalize non-traditional family arrangements and broaden their understanding of family structure. Recent empirical evidence from sub-Saharan Africa shows that polygynous family systems are deeply embedded within socio-cultural contexts and influence how individuals perceive family roles and relationships (Anjorin et al., 2020). More recent work by Mulenga et al. (2025) further demonstrates that adolescents raised in polygamous households develop distinct perceptions of family dynamics, shaped by shared parenting, distributed caregiving, and exposure to multiple parental figures. Such exposure may foster familiarity and acceptance of plural relationship structures, thereby contributing to more positive attitudes toward phenomena such as the baby mama syndrome.

Conversely, the study found that individuals from dual-parent families exhibited the least positive attitudes toward the baby mama syndrome. This aligns with scholarship emphasizing that family stability and structure play a key role in shaping normative beliefs about relationships. Evidence suggests that individuals raised in stable, two-parent households are more likely to internalize conventional norms regarding exclusivity, cohesion, and structured parenting (Nahkur & Kutsar, 2022). Contemporary family research highlights that while diverse family forms are increasingly recognized, societal expectations still tend to privilege stable, cohesive family arrangements as the ideal, which in turn shapes individual attitudes toward alternative structures (Kato, 2025). Thus, individuals from dual-parent families may be less inclined to endorse non-traditional arrangements, perceiving them as inconsistent with the values of stability, commitment, and clearly defined parental roles that characterize their upbringing.

Findings also suggested that social support had a significant influence on attitude toward baby mama syndrome. Thus, the second hypothesis which stated that social support will significantly predict attitude towards baby mama syndrome was accepted. This finding is in consonance with the study by Muarifah et al. (2019) who found that social support influenced single mothers' subjective well-being. This finding is inconsistent with findings of no study according to the knowledge of the researcher. The study further found that family support had an independent influence on attitude towards baby mama syndrome. The result showed that the higher the family support, the lower the positive attitude towards baby mama syndrome and this could be because of the fact that Children who receive high levels of family support usually have a stronger sense of security and belonging within their immediate family unit. This experience of a close-knit family could lead to a preference for more traditional family structures and a less positive attitude towards the baby mama phenomenon.

The study further revealed that personality traits of the five factor model jointly influenced attitudes toward the baby mama syndrome, leading to the acceptance of the third hypothesis. This finding is consistent with recent literature which emphasizes that personality traits play a significant role in shaping social attitudes and perceptions of non-traditional behaviors. Contemporary studies grounded in the Five-Factor Model indicate that personality dimensions are strong predictors of attitudes toward social issues and relationship norms (e.g., DeYoung et al., 2007; Bleidorn et al., 2018). Specifically, the study found that extraversion and neuroticism had positive influences on attitudes toward the baby mama syndrome, while conscientiousness had a negative influence. The positive influence of extraversion may be attributed to the tendency of extroverted individuals to be more sociable, open to interpersonal experiences, and receptive to diverse viewpoints.

Research suggests that extraversion is associated with greater social tolerance and openness to non-conventional lifestyles, as extroverts are more likely to engage with diverse social networks and perspectives (Bleidorn et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2018). This may explain their relatively non-judgmental stance and willingness to accept alternative family arrangements. Similarly, the positive association with neuroticism may be linked to heightened emotional sensitivity. Individuals high in neuroticism tend to be more emotionally reactive and empathetic toward the experiences of others. Emerging evidence indicates that emotional reactivity can enhance empathetic concern, particularly in contexts involving social vulnerability and non-normative life circumstances (Shanahan et al., 2014). This

emotional attunement may foster understanding and acceptance of individuals involved in complex family structures such as the baby mama phenomenon.

In contrast, conscientiousness was found to negatively influence attitudes toward the baby mama syndrome. This aligns with recent findings that individuals high in conscientiousness are more likely to adhere to established norms, rules, and socially sanctioned behaviors (Roberts et al., 2017). Conscientious individuals tend to value order, responsibility, and traditional structures, including conventional family systems. As such, they may perceive non-traditional arrangements like the baby mama phenomenon as deviant from societal expectations, thereby fostering less favorable attitudes. This position is supported by recent studies linking conscientiousness with conservative value orientation and resistance to social change (Vecchione et al., 2012).

Finally, males showed more positive attitude towards baby mama syndrome than females. Thus, the fourth hypothesis which stated that females will show more positive attitude towards baby mama syndrome was rejected. Although this finding seems surprising as one would expect that females would show more positive attitude towards Babymam Syndrome than males, it is supported by previous findings such as Awopetu, Ihuoma and Newton (2013) which found that males had more positive attitudes towards teenage pregnancy. A possible reason why this result was obtained in this study may be due to the prestige attached to having a baby mama among Gen-Z models, influencers, and artistes in contemporary eras.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Understanding attitudes towards the 'baby mama' syndrome is essential, particularly for final-year university students who are at a critical stage in forming long-term personal and social views. This knowledge equips them with the insights needed to make informed decisions about family structures and relationships. Furthermore, parents play a crucial role in shaping their children's attitudes towards such social phenomena. By recognizing the impact of family background on these attitudes, parents can better guide their children. School counselors also need to be aware of the predictive factors associated with the 'baby mama' syndrome. This awareness allows them to provide more effective counseling and support to students who may be influenced by these factors. Additionally, it is imperative for society, relevant agencies, and organizations to enhance their efforts in educating the public about the 'baby mama' syndrome. Through intensified sensitization campaigns, Nigerians can gain a better understanding of the syndrome and learn how to navigate its implications effectively.

This study faced several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the sensitive nature of the variables may have resulted in social desirability bias among respondents, potentially skewing the data. Secondly, the retrospective nature of the assessment method could have led to underreporting by respondents. Additionally, the cross-sectional and correlational design of the research precludes any conclusions about causal relationships between variables. While the sample size was relatively large by conventional standards, it may not be sufficient for making generalizations about the entire Nigerian population. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted with caution and not generalized to other samples within or outside Nigeria. Moreover, the participants were undergraduate

students from a single university in Lagos, which is not representative of the broader student population in Lagos or Nigeria as a whole. Finally, the lack of funding for this research limited the spread and geographical scope of data collection, further restricting the study's generalizability.

Data Availability Statement

The data that supports the findings of this study can be provided upon request from the corresponding author

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there are no known competing financial or personal interests that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper

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PROJECT-BASED OUTDOOR AND NON-FORMAL LEARNING IN INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION: AN EXPLORATORY QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

This exploratory qualitative study examined undergraduate students' experiences of project-based learning conducted in outdoor and non-formal educational contexts within an initial teacher education programme. The participants were 74 second- and third-year students enrolled in the Primary and Preschool Education Pedagogy programme who took part in a semester-long educational intervention involving outdoor activities, community-based projects, creative workshops, and applied interdisciplinary tasks. Data were collected through reflective journals, semi-structured focus groups, direct observations, and educational products developed by the students. The data were analysed thematically through an iterative process of coding, theme development, and comparison across data sources. Limited descriptive quantification was used only to summarise selected explicitly coded responses. The analysis generated four interrelated themes: increased engagement and motivation, perceived development of transversal competencies, a broader understanding of alternative educational approaches, and reflection on the transfer of learning to future teaching practice. Participants' accounts suggest that project-based outdoor and non-formal activities were experienced as meaningful opportunities for collaboration, autonomy, creativity, reflection, and professional learning. The findings provide exploratory support for the integration of such activities into initial teacher education, while their interpretation remains limited by the single-institution context, convenience sampling, and the predominantly qualitative nature of the data.

Keywords: *project-based learning; outdoor education; non-formal learning; initial teacher education; transversal competencies; qualitative research.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary teacher education is increasingly expected to prepare students for professional contexts that extend beyond the transmission of subject knowledge. Future teachers are required to communicate effectively, collaborate with others, respond flexibly to unfamiliar situations, reflect on their own practice, and design learning experiences connected to children's everyday lives. These expectations have encouraged universities to reconsider teaching approaches that remain centred primarily on lectures and the reproduction of theoretical content. Within this broader shift, project-based learning, outdoor

education, and non-formal learning have attracted attention as approaches capable of connecting academic knowledge with authentic educational situations.

Project-based learning is commonly understood as a student-centred approach in which learning is organised around meaningful questions, practical challenges, collaborative inquiry, and the development of concrete products or solutions. Rather than receiving information in a largely passive manner, students are expected to investigate, make decisions, negotiate responsibilities, and reflect on both the process and the outcomes of their work (Thomas, 2000; Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2006). The approach is grounded in constructivist perspectives, according to which knowledge is actively developed through interaction, experience, and participation in socially and culturally meaningful contexts (Piaget, 1972; Vygotsky, 1978).

In initial teacher education, project-based learning may be particularly relevant because it allows students to experience the type of active pedagogy that they may later be expected to use in schools. When students design educational resources, organise activities for children, collaborate with community organisations, or respond to real educational problems, they are not merely learning about teaching at a theoretical level. They are also rehearsing professional decision-making, responsibility, communication, and pedagogical creativity. Such experiences may therefore contribute to the gradual connection between university learning and the realities of future professional practice.

The integration of outdoor education adds an experiential and contextual dimension to project-based learning. Activities conducted in natural, urban, or community spaces can create opportunities for observation, movement, inquiry, cooperation, and the direct application of disciplinary knowledge. Outdoor learning may also encourage students to reconsider the boundaries of the classroom and to recognise the educational value of local environments, public spaces, and community resources (Beames et al., 2012; Waite, 2011). For future primary and preschool teachers, this perspective is especially relevant because many curricular areas, including language, mathematics, science, art, and civic education, can be approached through direct exploration and interdisciplinary tasks.

Non-formal learning further broadens these possibilities. Characterised by flexible organisation, active participation, and an emphasis on personal and social development, non-formal education can complement formal university instruction by creating spaces in which students take initiative and assume greater responsibility for their own learning. Community projects, workshops, simulations, voluntary activities, and partnerships with non-governmental organisations may support forms of learning that are difficult to reproduce through conventional classroom instruction alone. They can also expose students to diverse social contexts and encourage them to consider education as a practice connected to civic participation, inclusion, and community responsibility (European Commission, 2015).

The educational relevance of these approaches can also be considered through a psychological lens. Project-based, outdoor, and non-formal activities may create conditions that support intrinsic motivation when students perceive tasks as meaningful, experience a degree of choice, and feel that their contribution matters. From the perspective of self-determination theory, learning environments that support autonomy, competence, and relatedness are more likely to encourage sustained and self-directed engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2000). However, participation in an innovative activity does not automatically produce

motivation. Students may respond differently depending on their prior experiences, perceived competence, group relationships, and the extent to which the activity is genuinely relevant to them.

Similar caution is necessary when discussing autonomy and self-regulation. Project work often requires students to plan tasks, organise resources, monitor progress, and adjust their strategies. These processes may contribute to the development of self-regulated learning, particularly when students are encouraged to reflect on difficulties and evaluate their own decisions (Zimmerman, 2002). Yet autonomy should not be understood as the simple absence of teacher guidance. In educational projects, it is usually developed through structured support, negotiated responsibility, and opportunities to make increasingly complex decisions.

The concept of self-efficacy is also relevant to the preparation of future teachers. When students successfully design and facilitate educational activities, solve practical problems, or receive constructive feedback from peers and community partners, they may develop greater confidence in their capacity to act in professional situations (Bandura, 1997). At the same time, such confidence can remain fragile if it is based only on isolated positive experiences. It is therefore useful to examine how students themselves interpret these experiences and whether they connect them to their future roles as teachers.

Reflection represents another central dimension of experiential and project-based learning. Reflective journals, group discussions, and feedback activities may help students move beyond the description of what happened and consider why particular decisions were effective, what difficulties emerged, and how their understanding of teaching changed. This process is closely related to the formation of professional identity, which develops gradually through the interaction between personal beliefs, educational experiences, institutional expectations, and imagined future practice (Beijaard et al., 2004). In this sense, initial teacher education does not simply provide techniques. It also offers contexts in which students begin to define what kind of teachers they hope to become.

Despite the growing interest in project-based, outdoor, and non-formal education, the combination of these approaches has received comparatively limited attention in the context of initial teacher education. Much of the literature discusses their general pedagogical benefits or their application with children and school pupils. Less is known about how university students preparing for the teaching profession experience combined project-based, outdoor, and community-oriented activities, how they interpret their own learning, and which aspects they consider transferable to future classroom practice.

This gap is relevant because claims concerning engagement, autonomy, creativity, or professional development should not be based solely on the presumed value of innovative teaching methods. They need to be examined through empirical evidence and through careful attention to participants' accounts. A qualitative perspective is useful in this regard because it allows researchers to explore the meanings students assign to their experiences, the tensions they encounter, and the ways in which they connect practical activities with their developing professional identities.

The present study addresses this issue by exploring the experiences of undergraduate students enrolled in the Primary and Preschool Education Pedagogy programme who participated in a semester-long educational intervention integrating project-based learning,

outdoor activities, creative workshops, interdisciplinary investigations, and community-based projects. The study focuses on how students described their participation, what forms of personal and professional learning they associated with these experiences, and how they understood the possible transfer of such learning to their future teaching practice.

2. RESEARCH AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of this study was to explore how undergraduate students enrolled in an initial teacher education programme experienced project-based learning activities conducted in outdoor and non-formal educational contexts. More specifically, the study sought to examine the meanings students attributed to their participation in these activities, the forms of personal and professional learning they associated with the experience, and the extent to which they perceived such learning as relevant to their future teaching practice.

The study was guided by an exploratory qualitative perspective. It did not seek to test causal relationships or to determine the effectiveness of the educational intervention through standardised measures. Instead, it focused on students' subjective accounts, reflections, and interpretations of their participation in a semester-long programme that combined project-based learning, outdoor activities, interdisciplinary tasks, creative workshops, and community-based educational experiences.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How did undergraduate students describe their experiences of participating in project-based outdoor and non-formal learning activities?
2. What forms of personal and professional learning did students associate with their participation in these activities?
3. How did students perceive the relevance and possible transfer of these experiences to their future teaching practice?

These questions were formulated to capture the experiential, reflective, and professionally oriented dimensions of the intervention. They also provided the analytical framework for examining the reflective journals, focus-group discussions, observation notes, and educational products generated during the project.

3. METHOD

3.1. Qualitative Research Design

The study employed an exploratory qualitative design to examine undergraduate students' experiences of project-based learning conducted in outdoor and non-formal educational contexts. More specifically, the research focused on a semester-long educational intervention implemented within an initial teacher education programme.

A qualitative approach was selected because the study sought to understand how students interpreted their participation in the activities, what forms of personal and professional learning they associated with these experiences, and how they perceived the relevance of such learning to their future teaching practice. The study did not aim to establish causal effects or to measure changes in competencies through standardised instruments.

The primary sources of data were students' reflective journals, semi-structured focus-group discussions, direct observation notes, and educational products developed during the intervention. Limited descriptive quantification was used only to indicate the occurrence of selected explicitly coded responses. Such numerical summaries were treated as supplementary to the qualitative analysis and not as inferential evidence of effectiveness.

3.2. Participants and Sampling

The participants were 74 second- and third-year undergraduate students enrolled in the Primary and Preschool Education Pedagogy programme at Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad, Romania. Their ages ranged approximately from 19 to 57 years. The group included 69 women and 5 men.

Participants were recruited through convenience sampling because they were enrolled in the courses within which the educational intervention was implemented. All students involved in the semester-long activities were invited to participate in the research component of the project. Of the 90 students invited, 74 agreed to participate and provided informed consent.

Participation in the educational activities formed part of the academic programme, whereas participation in the research component was voluntary. Students were informed that their decision to participate or not participate in the study would have no influence on their course grades, academic evaluation, or relationship with the teaching staff.

All 74 participants contributed data through direct observation and project products. Reflective journals were submitted by 24 participants, while 50 students took part in the focus-group discussions. Where participants contributed to only some sources of data, this was taken into account during analysis and interpretation.

The intervention was situated within the curriculum of the Primary and Preschool Education Pedagogy programme and was designed to connect theoretical coursework with experiential, interdisciplinary, and community-based learning.

3.3. Educational Intervention and Procedure

The educational intervention was conducted over one university semester, lasting approximately 14 weeks. It included approximately 11 sessions or activity blocks. The intervention combined project-based learning with outdoor education, non-formal activities, interdisciplinary investigations, creative workshops, and community-based projects.

The intervention was organised into three broad stages: planning, implementation, and evaluation-reflection. During the planning stage, students were introduced to the aims of the projects, formed working groups, selected or received thematic tasks, and developed initial activity plans. During the implementation stage, they participated in outdoor and community-based activities, designed educational resources, collaborated with local organisations, and carried out practical tasks. During the final stage, students reflected on the experience through journals, group discussions, feedback sessions, and the presentation of project products.

The main activities included outdoor reading and writing sessions, creative workshops using natural materials, interdisciplinary mathematics and science investigations, community

projects conducted in cooperation with schools and non-governmental organisations, and simulations focused on real-world educational or civic problems.

Outdoor reading and writing sessions were conducted in green spaces near the university campus. Students participated in reflective writing, creative writing inspired by natural elements, and group discussions organised outside the conventional classroom environment.

Creative workshops included activities such as wild art, shadow drawing, and the construction of thematic products using leaves, branches, stones, flowers, and other natural materials. These activities required students to work collaboratively, negotiate ideas, and produce educational resources that could later be adapted for preschool or primary school settings.

Applied mathematics and science activities included measurement tasks, compass orientation, observation of natural phenomena, and the construction of a sundial. These activities were designed to encourage students to translate abstract curricular concepts into concrete and interdisciplinary learning experiences.

Community-based projects were carried out in partnership with schools, local institutions, and non-governmental organisations. Students designed and facilitated educational games, creative workshops, and learning activities for children, including children from socially or educationally disadvantaged contexts.

Problem-solving simulations addressed issues such as the lack of green spaces, environmental pollution, traffic safety, local heritage, nutrition, and community participation. Students were asked to propose educational interventions, allocate responsibilities, design implementation plans, and present their solutions.

All students participated in a common core of activities, although some project tasks differed according to group topic, partner organisation, and selected educational context. The coordinating teaching staff facilitated the intervention, provided feedback, and observed student participation throughout the semester.

3.4. Data Collection

Data were collected from four complementary sources: reflective journals, semi-structured focus-group discussions, direct observations, and educational products. The use of multiple sources made it possible to examine students' experiences from individual, collective, behavioural, and product-oriented perspectives.

3.4.1. Reflective Journals

Students completed reflective journals following the main activity blocks. The journals were submitted digitally and included responses to guiding prompts concerning meaningful learning experiences, emotional and cognitive engagement, collaboration, difficulties encountered, perceived competency development, and possible applications in future teaching practice.

Each participant submitted approximately 7 journal entries, resulting in a corpus of 98 reflective texts. Students were encouraged to describe both positive and difficult aspects of the experience rather than provide only favourable evaluations.

For the purposes of the research, identifying information was removed from the journal entries and each participant was assigned an anonymous code.

3.4.2. Focus-Group Discussions

At the end of the intervention, 8 semi-structured focus groups were conducted, with approximately 10 to 12 participants in each group. The discussions lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and were moderated by the researcher.

The interview guide included questions about students' overall experience, perceived changes in engagement, collaboration, autonomy, confidence, professional learning, and the potential transfer of the activities to future teaching practice. Participants were also invited to discuss less successful experiences, practical constraints, and aspects they would modify.

The focus groups were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim. The discussions were conducted in Romanian, and quotations selected for publication were translated into English. The translations were checked against the original wording to preserve participants' intended meaning.

3.4.3. Direct Observation

Direct observation was conducted by the coordinating teaching staff throughout the intervention. Observations were recorded using a structured grid focused on active participation, responsibility, cooperation, initiative, autonomy, communication, problem solving, and engagement with the tasks.

Observation notes were completed during or immediately after the activities. The observers also recorded contextual information, critical incidents, group dynamics, and examples of student behaviour that supported or contradicted emerging interpretations.

Because the teaching staff were involved both in facilitating and observing the activities, the dual role of teacher and researcher was considered during interpretation. Observation data were therefore used in conjunction with the other sources rather than as independent evidence of change.

3.4.4. Educational Products

The educational products analysed included portfolios, lesson scenarios, outdoor learning plans, creative materials, interdisciplinary resources, community project proposals, and presentation materials. A total of 60 individual and group products were included in the analysis.

The products were examined in relation to the research questions, particularly for evidence of interdisciplinary thinking, pedagogical creativity, collaboration, adaptation to authentic contexts, and anticipated transfer to future teaching practice. They were not evaluated as standardised measures of competency development.

3.5. Data Analysis

The data were examined using thematic analysis. The analytical process was primarily inductive, as the initial codes were generated from participants' accounts and the empirical material. However, the analysis also included a limited deductive component informed by the

research questions and by sensitising concepts such as engagement, autonomy, reflection, collaboration, self-efficacy, and professional learning.

The analysis followed several iterative stages. First, the researchers familiarised themselves with the dataset by repeatedly reading the reflective journals, focus-group transcripts, observation notes, and selected project products. Initial comments and preliminary patterns were recorded during this stage.

Second, relevant segments of the material were assigned descriptive and interpretative codes. Coding focused on how students described their participation, the meanings they attributed to the activities, the forms of learning they identified, the difficulties they encountered, and the ways in which they connected the experience to their future professional roles.

Third, related codes were compared and grouped into broader categories. These categories were then examined across the different sources of data to identify convergent, complementary, and divergent patterns. Reflective journals and focus-group transcripts constituted the primary sources for theme development, while observation notes and educational products were used to contextualise and triangulate the participants' accounts.

Fourth, preliminary themes were developed and reviewed in relation to the coded extracts and the complete dataset. Themes were retained when they represented coherent patterns relevant to the research questions and when they were supported by more than isolated statements. Attention was also given to responses that did not conform to the dominant patterns.

Fifth, the themes were refined, defined, and named. The final thematic structure included four interrelated themes: engagement and motivation, perceived development of transversal competencies, reconsideration of alternative educational approaches, and reflection on transfer to future teaching practice.

The analysis was conducted by 2 researchers. The researchers initially coded a selection of the material independently and then compared their interpretations. Differences were discussed until a shared interpretation was reached.

Limited descriptive quantification was applied only after the thematic coding had been completed. Frequencies were calculated for selected explicit responses, such as participants stated intention to use outdoor or non-formal activities in their future teaching. These counts referred to the number of participants who clearly expressed the respective idea in the analysed data and were not interpreted as statistical measures of effect.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with recognised ethical principles for educational research.

Before data collection, participants received written and oral information about the aims of the study, the types of data collected, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw without academic consequences. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants included in the research.

Students were explicitly informed that participation in the research component was separate from participation in the educational activities and that refusal to participate would not affect their grades, assessment, or academic standing. Data used for research purposes

were accessed and analysed only after the academic evaluation of the relevant activities had been completed.

Confidentiality was protected by removing names and identifying details from journals, transcripts, observation records, and project materials. Participants were assigned anonymous codes, such as RJ01 for reflective journals and FG02 for focus-group contributions. Quotations included in the manuscript were selected and presented in a manner that prevented identification.

Participants in the focus groups were also reminded that, although the researchers would protect the confidentiality of the records, complete confidentiality among group members could not be guaranteed. They were therefore asked not to disclose the content of the discussions outside the group.

All digital materials were stored in password-protected files, while any paper-based materials were kept in secure storage accessible only to the research team.

3.7. Reflexivity and Qualitative Rigor

Several procedures were used to strengthen the credibility and transparency of the analysis. First, methodological triangulation was achieved through the comparison of reflective journals, focus-group discussions, observation notes, and educational products. Convergence across sources was considered supportive of an interpretation, while discrepancies were examined rather than removed.

Second, the analytical process was documented through coding notes, theme-development tables, and records of decisions concerning the inclusion, modification, or rejection of themes. This audit trail made it possible to trace the development of the findings from the initial material to the final thematic structure.

Third, the researchers engaged in reflexive consideration of their roles in the educational intervention. Because the coordinating teaching staff were also involved in data collection and interpretation, particular attention was paid to the possibility that students might provide socially desirable responses or emphasise positive experiences. The analysis therefore included negative cases, ambivalent responses, practical difficulties, and statements that challenged favourable interpretations.

Fourth, quotations and concrete examples were retained in the Results section to demonstrate the connection between the interpretations and the original data. Themes were not treated as objective entities discovered independently of the researchers, but as interpretative patterns developed through systematic engagement with the dataset.

Finally, the study provides contextual information about the participants, institutional setting, intervention, and data-collection process so that readers can assess the potential transferability of the findings to other initial teacher education contexts.

4. RESULTS

The thematic analysis generated four interrelated themes:

- engagement and motivation through experiential participation,
- perceived development of transversal competencies,

- reconsideration of outdoor and non-formal education, and
- reflection and anticipated transfer to future teaching practice.

The themes were developed primarily from reflective journals and focus-group discussions, while observation notes and educational products were used to support and contextualise the analysis.

4.1. Engagement and Motivation Through Experiential Participation

Students frequently contrasted the intervention with more conventional university learning. Outdoor activities, creative workshops, simulations, and community projects were described as more engaging because they required direct participation, practical decision-making, and collaboration.

Participants also associated engagement with the visible purpose of the activities and the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in concrete situations.

Engagement was not experienced uniformly. Some students reported initial hesitation when they were required to speak publicly, coordinate peers, or facilitate activities with children.

Observation notes suggested that, over time, students became more willing to distribute responsibilities, adapt plans, and make decisions independently.

At the same time, participants mentioned difficulties related to time management, weather conditions, unclear expectations, and unequal group participation.

These responses indicate that engagement depended not only on the novelty of the activities, but also on task structure, facilitation, and group dynamics.

4.2. Perceived Development of Transversal Competencies

Students identified communication, collaboration, creativity, problem solving, responsibility, autonomy, and leadership as competencies practised during the intervention.

Communication was discussed mainly in relation to teamwork, interaction with children, and the presentation of project outcomes.

Collaboration was described as both productive and demanding. Students valued the exchange of ideas but also referred to tensions caused by uneven involvement and different levels of commitment.

Creativity and problem solving were particularly evident in tasks that required students to adapt curricular content to outdoor settings, create materials from available resources, or revise activities when initial plans did not work.

Students also associated responsibility with the awareness that their decisions affected colleagues, partner organisations, and children.

However, the findings do not demonstrate measurable increases in competencies. They indicate that participants perceived the intervention as a context in which these competencies were actively practised.

4.3. Reconsidering Outdoor and Non-Formal Education

Some participants initially associated outdoor education mainly with recreation or extracurricular activities. Following the intervention, they described outdoor spaces as possible environments for structured curricular and interdisciplinary learning.

Activities involving measurement, compass orientation, creative writing, natural materials, and community exploration helped students connect theoretical content with direct experience.

Participants also reconsidered non-formal education. Several students reported that they had previously viewed such activities as relatively spontaneous, whereas the intervention showed them that non-formal learning also requires clear objectives, planning, role distribution, and reflection.

Students nevertheless identified barriers to future implementation, including limited time, safety concerns, administrative requirements, weather conditions, and insufficient institutional support.

An explicit intention to use outdoor or non-formal activities in future teaching was identified in the accounts of 42 participants, representing approximately 56% of the sample. This value was derived from explicitly coded statements and should be interpreted as a descriptive summary rather than as a standardised measure of behavioural intention.

4.4. Reflection and Anticipated Transfer to Teaching Practice

Reflective journals showed that students became more aware of their personal strengths, limitations, and responses to responsibility. Some reported increased confidence in organising activities, communicating with children, coordinating peers, or adapting to unexpected situations.

Others used reflection to identify areas that required further development, such as giving clearer instructions, managing time, or adapting activities to children's needs.

The project included the metaphor of a personal "superpower" as a reflective prompt. Students associated this metaphor with qualities such as empathy, patience, creativity, organisation, and adaptability.

The metaphor was treated as a pedagogical tool rather than as an independent analytical category. Its relevance lay in the way it encouraged students to connect personal qualities with future professional actions.

Participants also described how they might use outdoor, non-formal, and project-based activities in their future teaching.

Some participants referred specifically to collaboration with community organisations.

These statements reflected intentions and perceived relevance rather than evidence of sustained implementation. Some students acknowledged that they would need additional experience, institutional support, and classroom management strategies before using such approaches independently.

Overall, the findings suggest that students experienced the intervention as a meaningful context for practical, collaborative, and reflective learning. At the same time, their accounts revealed uncertainty, logistical difficulties, and concerns about future implementation. The results therefore provide exploratory qualitative evidence regarding perceived learning and professional relevance, but they do not establish causal effects or measurable competency development.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This exploratory qualitative study examined how undergraduate students in an initial teacher education programme experienced project-based learning activities conducted in outdoor and non-formal contexts. The findings suggest that participants perceived these activities as meaningful opportunities for active involvement, collaboration, reflection, creativity, and professional learning.

Students' accounts indicated that the practical and experiential character of the intervention supported their engagement and encouraged them to connect theoretical knowledge with concrete educational situations. They also described the projects as contexts in which they could practise communication, teamwork, problem solving, responsibility, autonomy, and pedagogical decision-making. These findings refer to participants' perceptions and should not be interpreted as evidence of objectively measured competency development.

The study also suggests that participation in outdoor and non-formal activities broadened students' understanding of where and how learning can occur. Several participants came to view natural and community spaces as potential educational resources and recognised that non-formal activities require clear objectives, planning, adaptation, and reflection. At the same time, students identified practical constraints, including limited time, safety requirements, weather conditions, group coordination, and the need for institutional support.

Reflective activities appeared to help students identify personal strengths, recognise areas requiring further development, and connect the intervention with their emerging professional identities. Participants expressed intentions to adapt some of the experienced methods to their future teaching practice, although such intentions do not demonstrate that these approaches will be implemented consistently in professional settings.

The findings provide exploratory support for the inclusion of project-based, outdoor, and non-formal learning experiences in initial teacher education. Their educational value appears to depend on careful planning, appropriate facilitation, opportunities for reflection, and a clear connection between practical activities and professional learning objectives.

The study has several limitations. It was conducted within a single university programme and involved a convenience sample of students from the same field of study. The findings are based mainly on reflective accounts, focus-group discussions, observations, and educational products, which may have been influenced by social desirability and by the dual role of the teaching staff as facilitators and researchers. Furthermore, the study did not include standardised measures, a comparison group, or long-term follow-up. The findings should therefore be understood as context-specific and exploratory rather than generalisable evidence of effectiveness.

Future research could examine similar interventions across several universities, include more diverse student groups, and investigate how participants apply outdoor and non-formal approaches during teaching practice or after entering the profession. Further studies could also combine qualitative data with validated measures of motivation, self-efficacy, self-regulation, professional identity, or transversal competencies.

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INSECURE ATTACHMENT AS A ROBUST PREDICTOR OF VULNERABLE NARCISSISM IN ADULT ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS IN THE POLOG REGION

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between adult attachment dimensions anxiety and avoidance, and vulnerable narcissism among adults in the Polog Region of North Macedonia. A quantitative, cross-sectional design was employed with a sample of 126 adults (75.4% female; 63.5% urban) aged 18–50. Correlation analyses revealed significant positive associations between vulnerable narcissism and both avoidant attachment ($r = .45, p < .01$) and anxious attachment ($r = .52, p < .01$). Hierarchical regression analysis demonstrated that while demographic factors were not significant predictors, the addition of attachment dimensions explained 37.4% of the total variance in vulnerable narcissism ($R^2 = .374, p < .001$). Both avoidant ($\beta = .360$) and anxious attachment ($\beta = .326$) emerged as robust positive predictors. The findings suggest that insecure attachment strategies, both hyper-activating and deactivating, are central to the development of narcissistic vulnerability in non-clinical populations. This underscores the necessity for therapeutic interventions in the Balkan region to focus on attachment repair and emotional regulation to mitigate personality pathology in intimate bonds.

Keywords: vulnerable narcissism, adult attachment, attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, romantic relationships.

1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding how individuals form and maintain a sense of self within interpersonal relationships is a central focus of personality and developmental psychology. A growing body of research suggests that early relational experiences with caregivers' shape enduring patterns of emotional regulation and interpersonal functioning.

Beyond primary attachment figures, adolescents' internal working models significantly shape how they navigate and perceive the broader social environment. In the

specific socio-cultural landscape of the Polog region, these relational dynamics manifest not only in peer or parental spheres but also in broader societal attitudes.

In adulthood, attachment insecurity is typically conceptualized along two main dimensions: attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance (Brennan et al., 1998). Individuals high in attachment anxiety tend to exhibit heightened fear of rejection, excessive need for reassurance, and strong emotional dependence on significant others. In contrast, individuals high in attachment avoidance tend to suppress emotional needs, maintain psychological distance in relationships, and emphasize self-reliance over intimacy. Although these strategies differ in expression, both are considered adaptive responses to inconsistent or emotionally unavailable caregiving environments during early development (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Alongside attachment processes, personality research has increasingly focused on narcissism as a multidimensional construct. While narcissism is often associated with grandiosity, dominance, and entitlement, contemporary models distinguish between grandiose and vulnerable forms. Vulnerable narcissism is characterized by fragile internal structures, hypersensitivity to evaluation, emotional instability, and a strong need for external validation (Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010). Unlike grandiose narcissism, which is outwardly assertive, vulnerable narcissism is marked by internal insecurity, shame-proneness, and interpersonal sensitivity.

Given the theoretical overlap between attachment insecurity and vulnerable narcissism, it is important to examine how these constructs are interconnected. Both attachment anxiety and vulnerable narcissism involve heightened sensitivity to rejection and a strong dependence on external validation, suggesting a potentially strong association. Attachment avoidance, although conceptually different, may also relate to narcissistic vulnerability through defensive emotional suppression and underlying unmet relational needs.

This research addresses a gap in the literature by focusing on adults aged 18-50 involved in committed romantic relationships in the Polog Region. The primary aim of this study is to examine the relationships among vulnerable narcissism and the insecure attachment styles of anxiety and avoidance, and to test the predictive role of attachment styles on vulnerable narcissism. Additionally, the study explores whether levels of vulnerable narcissism differ according to selected demographic characteristics, such as gender, socioeconomic status, relationship duration, marital status, education level, and residence. For instance, Zulqufliu et al. (2026) examined intergenerational interactions among adolescents in Tetovo and Gostivar, demonstrating that an intrinsic desire for social contact acts as a vital psychological buffer against discriminatory attitudes. Crucially, their study revealed that structural proximity alone such as cohabitation with grandparents was insufficient to mitigate negative stereotypes; instead, the quality and intentionality of the relationship were the true drivers of attitudinal change. This closely mirrors the core tenets of attachment theory, which posits that the psychological safety and emotional quality of a bond are far more definitive for development than mere physical presence. Consequently, an adolescent's underlying attachment style likely serves as a foundational framework for these high-quality social engagements, ultimately influencing their self-esteem and overall life satisfaction within this transitioning society. These patterns are commonly conceptualized

through attachment theory, which posits that internal working models formed in early childhood continue to influence behaviour, cognition, and affect in adulthood (Bowlby, 1969, 1982). Within this framework, individual differences in attachment security versus insecurity are particularly important for explaining variability in emotional stability and personality functioning.

The findings of this research offer substantial benefits to multiple stakeholders. For clinical psychologists and mental health professionals, understanding the robust link between attachment insecurity and vulnerable narcissism can inform more effective early intervention and therapeutic strategies for individuals struggling with hypersensitivity and emotion dysregulation. For couples and relationship counselors, this data clarifies how "hyper-activating" and "deactivating" strategies can undermine relationship stability by fostering defensive isolation. Academically, this study clarifies how insecure attachment dimensions significantly predict vulnerable narcissism a relationship that remains robust after controlling for demographic factors.

Despite the clinical relevance of these constructs, there is a lack of research focusing on how these relationships manifest in non-clinical populations in the Balkan region. This study is particularly significant given the socio-cultural context of North Macedonia, where traditional relationship values may interact with personality pathology in unique ways. While ethnocentrism and cultural relativism are often discussed in the context of Balkan political elites using them as populism tools, the psychological impact of such environments on individual personality development remains underexplored. By focusing on adults aged 18-50 in committed relationships, this research seeks to determine if the relationship between attachment dimensions and vulnerable narcissism remains robust across the adult lifespan.

Attachment Theory and Internal Working Models

The theoretical foundation of this study is rooted in the integration of Attachment Theory and Personality Psychology, which emphasizes the developmental origins of narcissism within interpersonal contexts. According to Bowlby (1969, 1973), early interactions with primary caregiving figures are instrumental in shaping internal working models mental representations of the self and others that serve as lifelong prototypes for relationships. These cognitive representations dictate how individuals regulate emotions and perceive security in adult romantic bonds. When parental care is inconsistent, rejecting, or fails to provide a secure base, the individual remains prone to adopting defensive personality strategies to manage profound interpersonal insecurities (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

Research on the etiology of narcissism suggests that childhood experiences, such as parental overvaluation or coldness, serve as critical antecedents to its development (Ewing, 2020). Furthermore, a recent three-level meta-analysis by Zhang et al. (2024) confirms a consistent, positive relationship between insecure attachment and pathological narcissism across various populations. Consequently, these early bonds serve as the primary pillar for understanding how adult personality traits emerge as maladaptive responses to perceived relational threats.

Anxious Attachment

Anxious attachment is characterized by the employment of hyper-activating strategies, which function as a psychological alarm system that is hypersensitive to any signs

of potential abandonment or rejection. Individuals exhibiting high levels of attachment anxiety often possess contingent self-esteem, where their sense of self-worth depends entirely on continuous validation and reassurance from their romantic partner (Saladino et al., 2024). This dynamic often results in a state of self-absorption that does not originate from genuine self-love, but rather from a desperate attempt to monitor and protect an ego structure that feels perpetually threatened.

In the context of romantic bonds, this anxiety can act as a moderator for relationship satisfaction, where the constant need for proximity and the fear of abandonment create a cycle of interpersonal tension (Besser & Priel, 2009).

Avoidant Attachment

In contrast, the avoidant attachment style operates through deactivating strategies, where the individual habitually minimizes the importance of intimacy and emotional closeness to avoid the potential for emotional pain. According to Cassidy and Shaver (2016), avoidant individuals build a facade of compulsive self-reliance, viewing others as inherently unreliable or intrusive. This orientation provides the psychological framework where narcissistic traits are adopted, as the individual relies on an artificial sense of superiority to compensate for the emotional isolation they have created for themselves (Calderon, 2021).

Vulnerable Narcissism

Vulnerable narcissism represents the introverted, hypersensitive, and thin-skinned side of the narcissistic construct, distinguishing it from the more overt grandiose narcissism. This trait is characterized by high levels of emotion dysregulation and intense, painful fluctuations in self-esteem (Saladino et al., 2024). According to Hendin and Cheek (1997), vulnerable narcissists suffer from deep-seated feelings of worthlessness, which they often attempt to conceal behind secret, internal fantasies of grand importance and recognition. They possess a hypervigilant nature, constantly scanning their social environments for even the slightest signs of belittlement, criticism, or social slight, which drives them toward defensive isolation.

Recent findings suggest that identity disturbance acts as the main contributor to the interpersonal problems seen in pathological narcissism (Biberdzic et al., 2023). This fragility is closely tied to experiences of shame; when individuals with vulnerable narcissistic traits experience social failure, their lack of a stable self-identity leads to profound emotional collapse (van Schie et al., 2021).

The development of vulnerable narcissism has been widely discussed in relation to early relational experiences. Psychodynamic theories propose that narcissistic vulnerability originates from disruptions in early caregiver responsiveness, particularly a lack of consistent empathy, mirroring, and validation (Kernberg, 1975; Kohut, 1971).

2. OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESES

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between adult attachment dimensions specifically anxious and avoidant styles and vulnerable narcissism among adults engaged in committed romantic relationships. Furthermore, the study seeks to determine the extent to which these attachment styles predict vulnerable narcissism,

controlling for demographic variables including gender, age, socioeconomic status, relationship duration, and place of residence.

2.1. OBJECTIVE

To assess the relationships among anxious attachment, avoidant attachment, and vulnerable narcissism.

To determine whether anxious and avoidant attachment significantly predict vulnerable narcissism.

To examine whether levels of vulnerable narcissism differ significantly across demographic groups (e.g., gender, relationship duration, socioeconomic status, age, residence).

Problem statement:

How do the anxious and avoidance attachment styles relate to vulnerable narcissism in adults who are in romantic relationships, and do these relationships remain significant after controlling for gender, age, relationship duration, socioeconomic status, and place of residence?

Research questions:

RQ1: Is there a statistically significant relationship between anxious attachment, avoidant attachment, and vulnerable narcissism in adults residing in the Polog Region?

RQ2: Do anxious and avoidant attachment styles significantly predict vulnerable narcissism after controlling for demographic factors (gender, age, socioeconomic status, relationship duration, and place of residence)?

RQ3: Do levels of vulnerable narcissism differ significantly based on demographic characteristics, including gender, relationship duration, socioeconomic status, age, and place of residence?

2.2. HYPOTHESES

The following research hypotheses were formulated:

H1: There is a statistically significant, positive correlation between both anxious and avoidant attachment styles and vulnerable narcissism in adults involved in committed relationships.

H2: Both anxious and avoidant attachment styles will function as significant, positive predictors of vulnerable narcissism when controlling for demographic variables.

H3: There will be statistically significant differences in vulnerable narcissism across demographic groups (e.g., by gender, relationship duration, and socioeconomic status).

3. METHOD

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional, and correlational research design. The primary focus is to examine the predictive relationship between attachment dimensions

(Anxiety and Avoidance) and Vulnerable Narcissism, focusing on individuals aged 18–50 involved in committed romantic relationships in the Polog Region, North Macedonia.

Participants

Table 1. Characteristics of Participants (N = 126)

Variable	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	31	24.6
	Female	95	75.4
Residence	Rural	46	36.5
	Urban	80	63.5
Education Level	Secondary Education	32	25.4
	Bachelor	60	47.6
	Master	34	27.0
Income	Low	2	1.6
	Medium	83	65.9
	High	41	32.5
Marital Status	In a Relationship	43	34.1
	Engaged	20	15.9
	Married	63	50.0
Relationship Duration	Less than 1 Year	17	13.5
	1–3 Years	37	29.4
	3–5 Years	18	14.3
	Above 5 Years	54	42.8

The final sample of the study consisted of 126 participants (N = 126) from the Polog Region. As shown in Table 1, the gender distribution was predominantly female, representing 75.4% (n = 95) of the sample, while males accounted for 24.6% (N = 31). In terms of residential background, the majority of the respondents lived in urban areas (63.5%, N = 80), compared to 36.5% (n = 46) residing in rural settings.

Regarding educational attainment, nearly half of the participants held a Bachelor's degree (47.6%), followed by those with a Master's degree (27.0%) and secondary education (25.4%). The socioeconomic status of the sample was primarily concentrated in the medium-income bracket (65.9%), with 32.5% reporting high income and a small minority (1.6%) reporting low income.

In relation to their romantic involvement, half of the participants were married (50.0%), while 34.1% were in a relationship and 15.9% were engaged. Furthermore, the duration of these relationships varied, with the largest group reporting a commitment of above five years (42.8%), while 13.5% were in relationships of less than one year. The participant sample consisted of adults with ages ranging from 18 to 50 years (M = 26.34, SD = 6.35). The age distribution was relatively broad, though concentrated toward younger adulthood, with the most frequent participants being 20 years old (10.3%) and 21 years old (9.5%).

Procedure

The data collection process was conducted over a four-month period, specifically from November 2025 to January 2026. The study utilized an online survey design, developed via Google Forms, which was distributed through academic networks and social media

platforms to reach young adults residing in the Polog Region. Potential participants received a digital invitation containing a brief description of the study's focus on romantic relationships and personality traits.

Upon accessing the survey link, individuals were required to read and accept an Informed Consent form. This document explicitly stated that participation was entirely voluntary, all responses would remain anonymous and protected under strict confidentiality protocols, and participants had the right to withdraw at any time without providing a reason. The survey was structured into three distinct sections to ensure clarity: a socio-demographic module, the Adult Attachment Scale (AAS), and the Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (HSNS). On average, participants completed the questionnaire in approximately 7 minutes. No incentives or rewards were provided for participation to minimize response bias. After the data collection phase concluded in January 2026, the data were exported and prepared for statistical analysis using SPSS.

Instruments

Attachment dimensions were assessed using the Anxious and Avoidant subscales of the Adult Attachment Scale (AAS; Collins & Read, 1990). The Anxious subscale comprised 6 items measuring fear of rejection and need for reassurance, and the Avoidant subscale comprised 6 items measuring discomfort with closeness and desire for independence. Participants rated items on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all characteristic to 5 = very characteristic).

Vulnerable narcissism was measured using the Hypersensitive Narcissism Scale (HSNS; Hendin & Cheek, 1997). This 10-item instrument assesses the thin-skinned aspect of narcissism, including hypersensitivity to judgment, social avoidance, and a fluctuating sense of self-worth.

Reliability and Validity of the Instruments

The internal consistency of the scales used in the current study was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficients. According to the criteria suggested by George & Mallery (2003) and Nunnally (1978), a Cronbach's alpha value above .70 is considered acceptable and indicates good internal consistency for research purposes. As shown in Table 2, all scales demonstrated reliable measurement properties.

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients for the Measured Variables

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items	Remarks
AAS Anxious	0.718	6	Good Reliability
AAS Avoidant	0.705	6	Good Reliability
HSNS (Narcissism)	0.731	10	Good Reliability

4. RESULTS

Prior to the main analyses, the data were screened for normality and outliers. The distributional properties of the study variables were assessed using skewness and kurtosis. For avoidant attachment, anxious attachment, and vulnerable narcissism, skewness values

ranged from -0.08 to 0.51, and kurtosis values ranged from -0.53 to 0.36. Since all values fell well within the acceptable range of ± 1.96 (Field, 2018), the assumption of normality was met, justifying the use of parametric statistical procedures. Additionally, a visual inspection of the Normal P-P Plots and histograms confirmed that the residuals were normally distributed.

Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients are presented in Table 3. The mean score for vulnerable narcissism was 3.05 (SD = 0.74). Regarding attachment dimensions, avoidant attachment reported a mean of 2.81 (SD = 0.78), while anxious attachment reported a mean of 2.33 (SD = 0.82).

The correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships between all study variables. Specifically, a strong positive correlation was found between anxious attachment and vulnerable narcissism ($r = .52, p < .01$), suggesting that individuals with higher levels of anxiety tend to exhibit higher levels of vulnerable narcissism. Similarly, avoidant attachment was significantly and positively correlated with vulnerable narcissism ($r = .45, p < .01$). Finally, a moderate positive correlation was observed between the two attachment dimensions, avoidant and anxious attachment ($r = .44, p < .01$).

Table 3. Means, Standard Deviations, and Inter-Correlations Among Study Variables

Variable	N	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Narcissism	126	3.05	0.74	—		
2. Avoidant	126	2.81	0.78	.45**	—	
3. Anxious	126	2.33	0.82	.52**	.44**	—

Note. N = 126. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation. ** $p < .01$.

To determine whether vulnerable narcissism levels varied as a function of sociodemographic background, a series of exploratory statistical analyses were conducted. Independent-samples t-tests were employed to examine mean differences between binary demographic groups, while one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were used to assess differences across categorical variables with multiple levels (marital status, education level, and relationship duration).

The results indicated that vulnerable narcissism scores were not significantly associated with gender, $t(124) = 0.38, p = .703$, nor were they influenced by place of residence (urban vs. rural), $t(124) = -1.30, p = .197$. Furthermore, one-way ANOVAs revealed no statistically significant differences in narcissistic vulnerability across marital status, $F(2, 123) = 0.35, p = .708$; education level, $F(2, 123) = 0.61, p = .546$; or the duration of romantic relationships, $F(3, 122) = 0.43, p = .730$.

The absence of significant variation indicates that the core features of vulnerable narcissism specifically hypersensitivity to evaluation, emotional dysregulation, and internal feelings of worthlessness are not differentially distributed based on gender, educational attainment, or the maturity of the romantic bond. Consequently, these results reinforce the understanding of vulnerable narcissism as a generalized personality feature in this population rather than one delimited by specific demographic markers. Consequently, the data do not support H3.

The demographic analyses indicated that vulnerable narcissism scores were not significantly influenced by participants' sociodemographic background. Specifically, no significant differences were observed across gender, place of residence, marital status, educational attainment, or the duration of romantic relationships (all $p > .05$).

The computed effect sizes Cohen's d (ranging from 0.08 to 0.23) for binary comparisons and Partial Eta Squared ($\eta^2_p \approx .010$) for multi-group ANOVA analyses consistently yielded negligible to small values. These results suggest that the core characteristics of vulnerable narcissism, within the studied sample from the Polog region, operate independently of external demographic markers. Consequently, these findings reinforce the theoretical focus of this study on internal relational processes namely, attachment insecurity as the primary psychological drivers of narcissistic vulnerability, rather than socio-environmental or demographic factors.

Table 4. Differences in Vulnerable Narcissism Based on Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Category	n	M	SD	t/F	df	p	Effect Size
Gender	Male	31	3.09	0.64	0.38	124	.703	$d = 0.09$
	Female	95	3.03	0.77				
Residence	Urban	80	2.98	0.75	-	124	.197	$d = 0.26$
	Rural	46	3.16	0.72	1.30			
Marital Status	In relationship	43	3.10	0.76	0.35	2, 123	.708	$\eta^2_p = 0.006$
	Engaged	20	2.93	0.66				
	Married	63	3.05	0.75				
Education Level	High School	32	3.17	0.75	0.61	2, 123	.546	$\eta^2_p = 0.010$
	Bachelor	60	3.02	0.73				
	Master	34	2.98	0.75				
Relationship Duration	< 1 year	17	2.91	0.83	0.43	3, 122	.730	$\eta^2_p = 0.006$
	1–3 years	37	3.14	0.69				
	3–5 years	18	2.98	0.75				
	> 5 years	54	3.05	0.76				

A hierarchical multiple regression was conducted to determine the predictive power of demographic characteristics and attachment dimensions on Vulnerable Narcissism. The results of the regression are summarized in Table 5. In the first step of the model, general characteristics including gender, age, residence, education level, and relationship status were entered. This initial model was not statistically significant, $F(5, 120) = 0.636$, $p > .05$, and accounted for only 5.8% of the variance ($R^2 = .058$). None of the individual demographic predictors reached statistical significance (all $p > .05$).

In the second step, the addition of attachment dimensions resulted in a statistically significant increase in the explained variance, $\Delta R^2 = .316$, $F(2, 118) = 28.222$, $p < .001$. The final model accounted for a total of 37.4% of the variance ($R^2 = .374$). Within this model, both avoidant attachment ($\beta = .360$, $p < .001$) and anxious attachment ($\beta = .326$, $p < .001$) emerged as significant positive predictors.

Table 5. Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Vulnerable Narcissism

Predictor	Model 1 (β)	Model 2 (β)
Step 1: General Characteristics		
Gender (1 = Female)	-.041	-.015
Age	.093	.052
Residence (1 = Urban)	.111	.084
Education Level	-.062	-.031
Relationship Status	.055	.028
Step 2: Attachment Dimensions		
Avoidant Attachment		.360*
Anxious Attachment		.326*
R ²	.058	.374
ΔR^2	.058	.316*
F for change in R ²	0.636	28.222*

Note. N = 126. Beta (β) values are standardized coefficients. * $p < .001$.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm that attachment insecurity, manifested through anxiety and avoidance, is a robust predictor of vulnerable narcissism among adults in the Polog region, explaining 37.4% of the total variance ($R^2 = .374$) (Zhang et al., 2024). The strong positive associations between these dimensions suggest that individuals with a constant need for reassurance or those who habitually avoid intimacy develop high sensitivity to evaluation and emotional instability, as described by Hendin and Cheek (1997). This model confirms that vulnerable narcissism serves as a defensive mechanism against insecure relational models, demonstrating that both hyper-activating and deactivating strategies are central to the development of this personality pathology.

Furthermore, demographic analyses indicated that vulnerable narcissism does not vary significantly by gender, socioeconomic status, or relationship duration, as the observed effect sizes *Cohen's d* (0.08 - 0.23) and *Partial Eta Squared* ($\eta^2_p \approx .010$) were negligible to small. This lack of significant variation, supported by the minimal effect sizes, reinforces vulnerable narcissism as a generalized personality construct in this cultural context, independent of external demographic markers. These findings underscore that therapeutic interventions in the Balkans should prioritize attachment repair and emotional regulation to mitigate personality pathology, while future research should further examine mediators such as shame-proneness and identity disturbance (Biberdzic et al., 2023; Saladino et al., 2024; van Schie et al., 2021).

6. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study provides empirical evidence that attachment insecurity is a powerful predictor of vulnerable narcissism in adults involved in committed romantic relationships in the Polog Region. The findings indicate that both anxious and avoidant attachment dimensions are significant positive predictors of narcissistic vulnerability, collectively explaining over a third of its variance. Notably, these psychological factors

remained robust while demographic characteristics showed no significant influence on narcissism scores.

The demographic analysis demonstrated that factors such as gender, residence, education, and relationship duration do not statistically moderate the manifestation of these traits. The negligible effect sizes ($d < 0.25$ and $\eta^2_p \approx .01$) observed across these variables suggest that vulnerable narcissism in this cultural context functions as a generalized personality construct rather than one tied to specific socioeconomic markers.

The significance of this research lies in its identification of the developmental antecedents of personality traits within the modern romantic landscape of North Macedonia. By focusing on a non-clinical sample, the study demonstrates that these dynamics are relevant to the general population, not just those in psychiatric care. Future interventions in the Balkan region should prioritize attachment repair and emotional regulation to mitigate personality pathology in intimate bonds.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study contributes to the nomological network of narcissism by clarifying how insecure attachment dimensions serve as robust predictors of vulnerable traits in a non-clinical, regional context. Practically, these results offer guidance for mental health professionals in North Macedonia. Clinicians should prioritize addressing attachment-related hyper-activating and deactivating strategies to help clients manage hypersensitivity and emotion dysregulation. For couples' therapists, the data clarifies how defensive isolation driven by attachment insecurity can undermine relationship stability.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design precludes any definitive conclusions regarding causality. Second, the sample was predominantly female (75.4%) and recruited via convenience sampling, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of the Polog Region. Finally, the reliance on self-report measures may introduce response bias, although the high internal consistency of the scales used suggests reliable measurement. This study utilized the Anxious and Avoidant subscales of the Adult Attachment Scale. While these dimensions capture the core mechanisms of attachment insecurity (hyper-activation and deactivation), they do not capture the full range of attachment classifications (such as secure attachment).

Future research should consider longitudinal designs to better understand the temporal stability of these links and explore potential mediators such as identity disturbance or shame-proneness. Additionally, expanding the sample to include a more balanced gender distribution and comparing clinical and non-clinical groups would further refine therapeutic strategies and enhance the cross-cultural understanding of narcissistic vulnerability.

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