Social Support in Childhood and its Translation into Adulthood

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Extensive research exists on the negative effects of traumatic experiences in childhood and its translation into adulthood; however, less research focuses on how specifically trauma affects attachment in later life. Even less attention is paid to gender and racial/ethnic differences on the consequences of trauma in adulthood. Previous research has found social support in childhood to be a protective factor against developing a psychiatric disorder, caused by trauma. This study aimed to understand how attachment in adult romantic relationships was influenced by the presence of support or distrust in childhood relationships. This study also aimed to understand how attachment in adult romantic relationships was influenced gender, race/ethnicity, adult depression, and adult self-efficacy. Data for this study came from the New Family Structures Study, which sought to understand the experiences of individuals growing up in unconventional families in the United States. The current study was a secondary data analysis of the New Family Structures Study data set (n = 15,058), utilizing Spearman’s Correlational tests, Mann-Whitney U tests, and Kruskal-Wallis H tests. Some of the significant findings include: Those who identified as being Non-Hispanic White reported more supportive and stable relationships in childhood; More supportive and stable childhood relationships were related to healthy levels of closeness in adult romantic relationships; Study participants who identified as male reported healthier feelings of closeness in adult romantic relationships, compared to those who identified as female. More feelings of depression in adulthood was related to higher levels of unhealthy closeness in adult romantic relationships. Findings suggest that higher levels of (childhood trauma) may be a risk factor for unhealthy patterns of attachment in adult romantic relationships. Future research should explore reasons for lower levels of social support among racial minority groups; attachment in gender non-conforming individuals in romantic relationships; and increasing access to mental health support for individuals who identify as being of 2 or more races/ethnicities.