
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Influence of Childhood Family Experiences on Women's Attitudes towards Marriage and Relationships

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| ABSTRACT

This article aims to explore the influence of childhood family experiences on women's attitudes towards marriage and relationships. Through literature review and surveys based on examples, it analyzes the shaping of women's attitudes towards marriage and relationships by analyzing the family environment and the quality of parental marriage, as well as their influencing mechanisms. The research findings indicate that the family environment has a significant impact on attitudes towards marriage and relationships, with factors such as family structure and the quality of parental marriage closely related to women's attitudes towards marriage and relationships. Parents' marriage serves as a role model in shaping women's attitudes towards marriage and relationships, and family emotions play a crucial role in the transmission of attitudes towards marriage and relationships. This study supports the hypothesis of the influence of childhood family experiences on women's attitudes towards marriage and relationships, further confirming the importance of childhood family experiences in shaping individual attitudes towards marriage and relationships. The results of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms behind the formation of women's attitudes towards marriage and relationships, providing a theoretical basis for promoting healthy marital and relationship outcomes.

| KEYWORDS

Childhood family experiences; women; attitudes towards marriage and relationships; family structure; quality of parental marriage.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Attitudes towards marriage and relationships are crucial factors influencing the quality of love and marital relationships, reflecting individuals' internal standards and subjective perceptions of marriage and romance (Su & Ren, 2008). As personal attitudes and values towards marriage and romance, attitudes towards marriage and relationships significantly impact individuals' choices in marriage and the quality of marital relationships. Childhood family experiences, as one of the most influential environments in an individual's development process, play a pivotal role in shaping attitudes towards marriage and relationships.

The influence of childhood family experiences on women's attitudes towards marriage and relationships involves factors such as family structure and the quality of parental marriage. Previous research has indicated that different family structures (such as single-parent families, nuclear families, etc.) have varying effects on women's attitudes towards marriage and relationships (Zhao, 2011). Parents serve as the initial marital models for their children, and the quality of their marriage directly affects their children's cognition and attitudes towards marriage. If parents have stable and harmonious marital relationships, their children are likely to develop positive attitudes towards marriage, viewing it as something beautiful and fulfilling. Conversely, if parents have unstable relationships with frequent conflicts, their children may develop negative views towards marriage, seeing it as painful and unreliable (Zhu, 2023).

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Women play significant roles in marriage and family, and their attitudes towards marriage and relationships are directly related to the stability and development of families and societies. By studying the impact of childhood family experiences on women's attitudes towards marriage and relationships, we can better understand the process of attitude formation, provide scientific foundations for family education and marital counseling, and thereby promote the healthy development of family and marital relationships (Miao, 2013). Researching the influence of family on women's attitudes towards marriage and relationships can deepen our understanding of marriage and family relationships. The family serves as the foundation of marriage and family relationships. By studying how childhood family experiences affect women's attitudes towards marriage and relationships, we can understand how the family environment influences individuals' marital decisions, marital satisfaction, and marital stability.

Based on surveys and research both domestically and internationally, it is evident that childhood family environment significantly influences women's attitudes towards marriage and relationships, primarily through the quality of parental marriage and family stability.

Amato (2001) suggests that women who experience stable parental marriages and positive parental relationships tend to pursue stable and fulfilling marital relationships. Furthermore, Amato (2008) found that parental divorce has long-term negative effects on women's marital quality, as women whose parents divorced are more likely to experience marital unhappiness and divorce.

Wallerstein's (2002) research indicates that the influence of childhood family experiences on women's attitudes towards marriage and relationships can persist into adulthood. She discovered that women who were affected by parental relationship issues during childhood are more likely to hold negative attitudes towards marriage in adulthood.

In summary, childhood family experiences have a considerable impact on women's attitudes towards marriage and relationships. This paper focuses on "family structure" and "quality of parental marriage" as the main research directions within childhood family experiences.

The present study adopts both questionnaire surveys and interviews as research methods. Initially, a questionnaire was administered to survey 15 randomly selected female participants in the school, addressing relevant issues. Subsequently, 8 female participants were selected from the initial group for further in-depth interviews. Through one-on-one face-to-face interviews, deeper insights into the participants' real-life situations and inner thoughts were obtained, providing robust data support for further exploration of the influence of childhood family experiences on women's attitudes towards marriage and relationships in this paper.

2. Survey Methods

2.1 Questionnaire Survey Method

In order to rapidly and effectively collect and understand basic information about the respondents, we randomly selected 15 female subjects to fill out the "Basic Information Survey Questionnaire" before conducting interviews to grasp information such as the respondents' ages, family situations, and emotional statuses. This provided data support for subsequent interviews and research. Throughout the survey process, we ensured the anonymity and privacy protection of the questionnaire, guaranteeing that the respondents' answers were genuine and reliable.

2.2 Interview Method

This study employed individual interviews. Through communication with the respondents, emotional resonance was established on an equal basis to accurately capture information. Face-to-face conversations were conducive to the accurate recording and collection of data.

Initially, we designed the "Influence of Childhood Family Experiences on Women's Marriage and Relationship Concepts Interview Outline." Subsequently, based on the information provided by the 15 female subjects in the questionnaire survey, we ultimately selected 8 female respondents for interviews. Interviews were conducted to record key statements and conversations with respondents, focusing on their childhood impressions of their fathers and mothers, current marriage and relationship concepts, as well as their ideal expectations for future families and partners. Finally, the interview data was organized and analyzed to explore the impact of different childhood family experiences on women's marriage and relationship concepts.

3. Survey Results

3.1 Basic Information of Interviewees

Table 1 Basic information about the interviewee

| Interviewee | Gender | Age | Family Structure | Relationship Status | Personality Orientation |
|-------------|--------|-----|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|
| T1 | Female | 22 | Single-parent family | Single | Dominant |
| T2 | Female | 23 | Single-parent family | Single | Submissive |
| T3 | Female | 23 | Nuclear family | Single | Submissive but assertive |
| T4 | Female | 23 | Nuclear family | Single | Initially submissive, then dominant |
| T5 | Female | 24 | Single-parent family | In a relationship | Submissive |
| T6 | Female | 22 | Nuclear family | In a relationship | Submissive |
| T7 | Female | 25 | Stepfamily | In a relationship | Dominant |
| T8 | Female | 22 | Stepfamily | In a relationship | Submissive |

Through the basic information survey of the interviewees, this study investigated a total of 8 interviewees with an average age of 23 years. Among them, three belonged to single-parent families, three belonged to nuclear families, and two belonged to stepfamilies. Four interviewees were single, and four were in a relationship.

3.2 Interview Data Record

Below are the records of key points extracted from the interview transcripts:

(1) Regarding "Views on Marriage and Love":

T3 expressed, "I don't reject love; as long as we get along well, anyone can try. I really look forward to marriage. I expect a high-quality marriage. Seeing my parents handle every problem and maintain order at home since childhood, I hope for such a positive marriage."

On the other hand, T7 articulated two different perspectives on marriage and love, "I used to feel that marriage was very important. My mom raised me alone when I was young, and it wasn't easy. After a few years, things improved when she found a partner, which made me realize having a companion is important. Both should have their own house car and then have a child. But now, I think it's okay not to get married. Living alone is more relaxing, and in today's environment, marriage doesn't bring me any benefits. As for having children, I believe it requires a lot financially and educationally, something I'm currently not able to provide. So, marriage is not as important to me as it used to be."

(2) Regarding "Views on Parents' Marriage":

T4 remarked, "I'm not sure what marriage should be like. I think it's better to focus on oneself. In our family, my mom has always been in charge. My dad never really gets involved in anything. He always seems supportive at first but then doesn't follow through. I feel like they have less and less to communicate about. In the future, I definitely won't find someone like my dad. Household matters should be handled together."

T1 mentioned, "I think all the problems in our family now are related to my parents' divorce when I was young. It was a big deal back then, and the legal battle lasted for many years. Eventually, I moved with my mom to another city. Many problems in life are related to their divorce. So, I feel marriage is unnecessary. It brings many new problems, and with divorce rates rising, there's no point in repeating the same mistakes."

(3) Regarding "Features Desired in Future Partners":

T2 stated, "Currently, I don't want to get married. If it happens, I hope the partner appears later. An ideal partner shouldn't have too many family ties; being independent is better. Marriage doesn't need to be based on love; living together respectfully is enough. In case there are any issues later, it's better to avoid too much emotional investment, and parting amicably is fine."

T8 expressed, "I think companionship is crucial. Spending time together is necessary to build a bond. Additionally, I believe having both wealth and love is important. Money might be slightly more crucial, but a balance is needed. The partner in dating and marriage differs; a dating partner requires more emotional value, it's an emotional need, while a marriage partner leans more towards the integration of two families, not just individual emotions."

(4) Regarding "Expectations for Future Marriage and Family":

All 8 interviewees mentioned the desire to form a separate new family with just the two of them, not living with each other's parents. They also mentioned the possibility of moving away from their current cities to a better one to develop together or buying a house and living in the city where the female partner currently resides.

4. Results Analysis

4.1 The Influence of Childhood Family Structure on Women's Marriage and Relationship Concepts

Family structure refers to the kinship relationships and living arrangements among family members. Different family structures will have different impacts on individuals' marriage and relationship concepts. A stable family structure fosters positive expectations towards marriage in women. In such families, women often witness mutual respect, trust, and support between their parents, leading them to hold positive attitudes and expectations towards marriage. They believe marriage is a stable and happy relationship and hope to establish a fulfilling marriage like their parents'. A healthy family structure also shapes women's marriage skills and values. If parents maintain a harmonious, equal, and respectful marital relationship, their positive attitudes towards marriage and love will influence their children, fostering positive and healthy marriage and relationship concepts (Pan, 2015). As evident from T3's views on "Views on Marriage and Love," growing up in a harmonious and equal family environment allows women to observe their parents' communication styles, conflict resolution methods, and the establishment of intimate relationships. These experiences and skills influence women's expectations and attitudes towards marriage, making them more focused on communication, understanding, and support within marriage. Family structure can also impose certain limitations on women's marriage and relationship concepts. For example, women raised in single-parent families may hold more cautious attitudes towards marriage because they may lack the experience and role models of a complete family. Similarly, women from divorced families may hold more skeptical attitudes towards the stability of marriage because they may have witnessed the breakdown of their parents' marriage. Family experiences shape certain marriage and relationship concepts in women's minds, which may influence them. However, through their own life experiences, these concepts may undergo changes based on their individual experiences.

Based on the responses to the question "Expectations for Future Marriage and Family" from the 8 female interviewees, we can see that women perceive themselves as more vulnerable in marriage and do not want to join the partner's family alone, preferring to form their own family in the city where the female partner's family resides or in another city where they work.

4.2 The Influence of Parents' Marital Quality during Childhood on Women's Marriage and Relationship

Concepts The quality of parents' marriage refers to the stability, harmony, and satisfaction of the marital relationship between parents. It is an important factor in a family and has profound effects on children's marriage and relationship concepts.

Firstly, the influence of parents' marital quality on women's marriage and relationship concepts primarily manifests in role modeling. Parents' marriage, as the earliest and most important model of children's marriage concepts, directly influences women's marriage and relationship concepts. If parents have a good marriage quality and live harmoniously, women often form positive and healthy marriage and relationship concepts, believing that marriage is a combination of love and happiness. Conversely, if the parents' marital quality is poor, with frequent conflicts or disharmony between spouses, women may hold negative attitudes towards marriage and doubt its stability and happiness (Dou, 2018). Prolonged disharmony between parents leads women to doubt marriage, considering it burdensome, and develop a more negative attitude towards marriage. Therefore, parents should be aware of their influence and actively guide their children to form positive and healthy marriage and relationship concepts (Hu et al., 2022).

Secondly, the influence of parents' marital quality on women's marriage and relationship concepts is also reflected in emotional support. Families with good marital quality often provide more emotional support and care. Women growing up in such family environments are more likely to form positive marriage and relationship concepts, believing in love and being willing to make efforts for marriage. Conversely, families with poor marital quality often have a cold and distant emotional atmosphere. Women may hold distrustful and resistant attitudes towards marriage, with lower demands and expectations for marriage (Xu, 2017). In the interview with T2, who expressed mistrust in marriage, mentioning that future partners shouldn't invest too much emotionally, and when discussing future marriage and family, the focus was on the emergence of problems, reflecting that poor parental marital quality may lower women's demands and expectations for marriage.

Lastly, the influence of parents' marital quality on women's marriage and relationship concepts also manifests in marriage behavior. Families with good marital quality often provide a good family education environment, where parents lead by example, teaching their children how to get along with partners and deal with marital problems. Women receive more positive and healthy marriage education in such families, facilitating the formation of sound marriage and relationship concepts. Conversely, families with poor marital quality often have a conflicted and disharmonious marital atmosphere. Women may be influenced by negative marriage

models, holding unfavorable attitudes towards marriage, and even displaying undesirable behaviors in marriage (Lu, 2017). For example, in T8's discussion about "Characteristics of Future Partners," it can be seen that emotional attachment is not a priority in the interviewee's marriage concept, and pursuits are focused on other aspects, indicating that separating marriage from love may not be conducive to the formation of positive marriage and relationship concepts.

In conclusion, parents' marriage has a significant impact on women's marriage and relationship concepts. The marital relationship and behavior patterns between parents influence children's cognition, expectations, satisfaction, and behavior towards marriage. Therefore, attention should be paid to the marital relationship between parents in families, focusing on cultivating positive and healthy marital models to promote children's healthy growth and the formation of positive marriage and relationship concepts. Social and educational departments should also provide relevant family education and marital counseling services to help families establish harmonious and stable marital relationships, promoting women's marital and relationship happiness (Hao, 2023).

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the influence of childhood family experiences on women's marriage and relationship concepts. Through a comprehensive analysis and synthesis of existing domestic and international research, the following conclusions were drawn:

1) Family Environment Shapes Marriage and Relationship Concepts: The family structure and the quality of parental marriage both significantly influence women's marriage and relationship concepts. A stable and harmonious family environment can cultivate positive and healthy marriage and relationship concepts in women.

2) Significant Impact of Parental Marriage on Women's Concepts: The stability and quality of parental marriage significantly affect women's attitudes and expectations towards marriage. Women from stable parental marriages tend to seek stable and happy marital relationships, while those from unstable parental marriages may hold more negative attitudes towards marriage.

Overall, childhood family experiences have multifaceted effects on women's marriage and relationship concepts, with the family environment and parental marital quality playing crucial roles. These effects are mainly realized through shaping family environments, parental marriages serving as role models, and the inheritance of family education methods. However, it's worth noting that this study only serves as a preliminary exploration in this field, and there are many details and mechanisms that require further in-depth research.

Future research could be expanded in several aspects. Firstly, it could explore other factors influencing women's marriage and relationship concepts, such as social and cultural backgrounds and personal experiences. Secondly, research on the mediating mechanisms of family environments on marriage and relationship concepts should be strengthened to gain a deeper understanding of how childhood family experiences influence women's concepts.

By conducting in-depth research on the influence of childhood family experiences on women's marriage and relationship concepts, we can better understand the process of forming these concepts, providing theoretical guidance and practical reference for the development of marital and family relationships.

While this study sheds light on the mechanisms and influencing factors of marriage and relationship concept formation, it still has some limitations that need further improvement and refinement. Firstly, the study mainly focused on the influence of childhood family experiences on women's marriage and relationship concepts without considering other social factors such as educational backgrounds and cultural traditions, which is also a direction worthy of further research. Secondly, the study primarily targeted women as research subjects without involving men's marriage and relationship concepts. Future research could consider the viewpoints and experiences of men, conducting comparative analysis to understand the similarities and differences between genders in marriage and relationship concepts more comprehensively.

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