



The Role of Childhood Emotional Neglect in Shaping Self-Disclosure and Relationship Satisfaction in Young Adults

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Abstract: Childhood emotional neglect (CEN) involves caregivers' omission of emotional support, impacting adult relationships. This quantitative correlational study examined CEN's links to self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction in 300 Delhi-NCR young adults (18-30 years) in romantic relationships, using CTQ (emotional neglect subscale), SDI, and RAS. Findings showed moderate CEN ($M=14.44$, $SD=5.44$), self-disclosure ($M=36.47$, $SD=8.70$), and satisfaction ($M=22.31$, $SD=6.34$). Correlations revealed weak positive ties: CEN-self-disclosure ($r=.147$, $p<.05$), CEN-satisfaction ($r=.152$, $p<.05$); strong self-disclosure-satisfaction ($r=.385$, $p<.01$). CEN subtly hinders openness, reducing relational fulfilment. Implications support emotional literacy interventions. Limitations: cross-sectional design, self-reports, regional sample.

Keywords: *Childhood Emotional Neglect, Self-Disclosure, Relationship Satisfaction, Young Adulthood, CTQ, RAS, Correlational Study*

1. Introduction

Young adulthood is that pivotal time in life when we're figuring out who we really are, gaining emotional independence, and building those deep, meaningful relationships. Childhood experiences profoundly shape emotional growth and relational abilities in later life. While many forms of childhood adversity receive attention, emotional neglect is frequently underrecognized, as it stems from the lack of emotional nurturing rather than overt mistreatment.

Childhood emotional neglect occurs when caregivers repeatedly fail to offer emotional support, warmth, affection, validation, or attentiveness to a child's emotional needs. In contrast to physical abuse, this form of neglect is insidious and often goes unnoticed, but its effects on psychological well-being are strong and enduring. Those affected may face challenges in recognising emotions, expressing them, and building trust in intimate relationships.

Self-disclosure forms the cornerstone of strong interpersonal bonds. It entails revealing personal thoughts, emotions, and experiences to others, fostering emotional closeness and shared understanding. Successful self-disclosure promotes trust, intimacy, and connection.

Relationship satisfaction reflects an individual's personal assessment of their romantic partnership's quality and rewarding nature. Elevated satisfaction correlates with emotional backing, candid dialogue, and reciprocal regard, whereas diminished satisfaction often arises from emotional detachment and poor communication.

This study investigates how childhood emotional neglect influences self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction during young adulthood. Exploring these links, it underscores the enduring emotional toll of childhood neglect and its impact on adult relationships.

1.1 Operational Definitions

Childhood Emotional Neglect

For this study, we're defining childhood emotional neglect based on scores from the Emotional Neglect subscale of the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ). This concept captures the degree to which participants report insufficient emotional warmth, support, affection, and attentiveness from primary caregivers during childhood.

It involves perceptions of not feeling cherished or special, lacking consolation amid upset, and encountering emotionally distant or unresponsive parents. Elevated subscale scores signify heightened perceived emotional neglect, while lower scores denote sufficient caregiver nurturance and emotional availability.

Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure is operationally defined here as the score on the Self-Disclosure Index (SDI). It measures the extent to which individuals voluntarily share personal thoughts, emotions, convictions, and experiences with key others, especially in intimate relationships.

The construct covers both the breadth and regularity of disclosed content, such as feelings, challenges, and confidential matters. Higher SDI scores reflect stronger openness, emotional candour, and relational transparency; lower scores indicate barriers to sharing, emotional restraint, and aversion to vulnerability.

Relationship Satisfaction

We're defining relationship satisfaction in this study as the score on the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS). It gauges a person's overall appraisal of their romantic relationship's quality, contentment, and positivity.

This encompasses views on intimacy, shared comprehension, reliability, interaction effectiveness, and global partnership approval. Higher RAS scores signal elevated fulfilment, steadiness, and emotional richness; lower scores point to discontent, detachment, and relational shortcomings.

1.2 Variables of the Study***Independent Variable (IV)******a) Childhood Emotional Neglect***

Childhood emotional neglect describes a sustained lack of emotional atonement from primary caregivers in early life. It manifests as missing emotional backing, affection, affirmation, and responsiveness to a child's feelings. Distinct from physical abuse, it hinges on caregivers' omissions rather than actions. Such neglect can hinder emotional recognition, self-esteem, secure bonds, and relational skills. In this study, childhood emotional neglect serves as the independent variable, as this early adversity may shape subsequent emotional and interpersonal outcomes.

Dependent Variables (DV)***a) Self-Disclosure***

Self-disclosure involves the deliberate revelation of personal thoughts, emotions, convictions, and experiences to others, especially within intimate relationships. It builds trust, emotional closeness, and reciprocal insight among partners. Successful self-disclosure allows for vulnerability expression and emotional support-seeking. In this study, self-disclosure functions as a dependent variable, posited to be influenced by early emotional histories, notably the level of childhood emotional nurturing.

b) Relationship Satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction captures a person's personal assessment of their romantic partnership's quality, joy, and gratification. It encompasses views on intimacy, reliability, dialogue, and reciprocal aid. Elevated satisfaction signals robust relational health, while reduced levels suggest detachment, discontent, and interpersonal challenges. In this study, relationship satisfaction acts as a dependent variable, shaped by long-term patterns of emotional exchange and social conduct.

Link between the Variables

Childhood emotional neglect profoundly affects emotional growth and relational patterns in adulthood. Those raised in such environments typically lack sufficient validation and support, fostering struggles with recognising, processing, and articulating emotions. They often harbour unhelpful convictions, like deeming emotional sharing risky or anticipating rejection and isolation upon vulnerability. These challenges impair self-disclosure in intimate bonds.

Self-disclosure acts as a key driver for cultivating and sustaining strong relationships. Transparent exchange of feelings and experiences deepens connections; bolsters trust and cultivates closeness. Freely shared inner worlds pave the way for empathy, comprehension, and relational fulfilment.

Yet, when childhood emotional neglect curtails self-disclosure, romantic ties may suffer from emotional gaps and miscommunications. Diminished candour erodes intimacy, sparking discord, unease, and volatility. Consequently, childhood emotional neglect is anticipated to undermine self-disclosure, thereby diminishing relationship satisfaction.

This study investigates the links between childhood emotional neglect, self-disclosure, and relationship satisfaction among young adults. Through these analyses, it elucidates how formative emotional voids influence mature relational dynamics and advances insights for therapies targeting enhanced communication and partnership health.

2. Review of Literature

Research has consistently highlighted the long-term impact of childhood emotional neglect (CEN) on adult interpersonal functioning, particularly in the domains of attachment, emotional expression, and relationship quality.

Müller et al. found that individuals who experienced emotional neglect during childhood exhibited higher levels of insecure attachment and social anxiety, along with reduced oxytocin functioning, which is crucial for social bonding. This suggests that early emotional deprivation can impair trust and emotional closeness in adult relationships.

Similarly, Zhang et al. reported that higher levels of childhood trauma were associated with lower romantic relationship satisfaction, with attachment insecurity acting as a mediator. Social support was identified as a protective factor.

Kara et al. (2025) further demonstrated that emotional neglect significantly predicts lower relational satisfaction and difficulty in fulfilling emotional needs, highlighting its long-term impact on interpersonal functioning.

In line with this, Irshad and Raj found that individuals with histories of emotional neglect are more likely to develop insecure attachment styles and exhibit dependency-based communication patterns in relationships.

Focusing on relationship outcomes, Masten, Telzer & Burkhard (2014) revealed that individuals with childhood emotional abuse or neglect reported lower marital satisfaction and weaker emotional support, indicating the enduring influence of early emotional experiences.

Adding to this, Di Pierro et al. (2019) found that emotional neglect predicts maladaptive relationship patterns such as love addiction, mediated by vulnerable narcissism, suggesting unhealthy dependency in romantic relationships.

Riggs highlighted that emotional neglect is linked to anxious and avoidant attachment styles, which are associated with reduced emotional intimacy and lower relationship satisfaction.

From an emotional functioning perspective, Gratz et al. (2004) reported that childhood neglect significantly impairs emotional regulation, making it difficult for individuals to identify and express emotions effectively.

Similarly, Godbout et al. (2009) found that emotional neglect contributes to reduced trust, poor communication, and increased conflict in romantic relationships.

Krause, Mendelson & Lynch (2025) emphasized that emotional neglect is strongly associated with alexithymia, which limits emotional awareness and negatively affects self-disclosure in intimate relationships.

A meta-analysis by Poquiz, Gottfried and Wegman (2020) confirmed a consistent negative association between childhood emotional neglect and adult relationship quality, reinforcing its long-term relational consequences.

Finally, Indian studies such as Sharma and Singh (2024) indicate that emotional neglect predicts rejection sensitivity and relational avoidance, highlighting its relevance within the Indian socio-cultural context.

2.1 Objectives of the Study

- a) To examine the relationship between childhood emotional neglect and self-disclosure among young adults.
- b) To examine the relationship between childhood emotional neglect and relationship satisfaction among young adults.
- c) To examine the relationship between self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction among young adults.

- d) To explore the role of childhood emotional neglect in shaping interpersonal communication and relationship quality in young adults.

2.2 Hypotheses of the Study

H1: Childhood emotional neglect will show a significant negative link with self-disclosure.

H2: Childhood emotional neglect will have a significant negative association with relationship satisfaction.

H3: Self-disclosure will have a significant positive relationship with relationship satisfaction.

H4: Childhood emotional neglect will significantly predict reduced self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction in young adulthood.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative design to investigate childhood emotional neglect's influence on self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction during young adulthood. A correlational approach assessed associations between variables. This methodology was selected for its capacity to deliver objective metrics, rigorous statistical evaluation, and broadly applicable insights.

Data were gathered via standardised psychological instruments delivered through an online survey tool (Google Forms) to participants.

3.2 Variables of the Study

The study involved the following variables:

Independent Variable (IV)

- Childhood Emotional Neglect

Dependent Variables (DV)

- Self-Disclosure
- Relationship Satisfaction

3.3 Sample Size

The sample comprised 300 young adults from Delhi and the NCR region. Participants were recruited via convenience sampling on digital channels including WhatsApp, Instagram, and email. Inclusion criteria encompassed both genders in romantic relationships lasting over six months.

3.4 Locality of the Study

The research took place in Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR), encompassing Noida, Ghaziabad, Gurugram, and Faridabad. Online data collection via Google Forms enabled convenient access for participants across these areas.

3.5 Inclusion Criteria

Participants met these requirements:

1. Young adults aged 18–30 years.
2. Currently in a romantic relationship lasting at least six months.
3. Residing in Delhi and the NCR region.
4. Willing to provide informed consent.
5. Able to read and respond in English.

3.6 Exclusion Criteria

Participants were excluded if they satisfied any of these:

1. Aged under 18 or over 30 years.
2. Not in a romantic relationship or in one lasting fewer than six months.
3. Not residing in the Delhi NCR region.
4. Submitted incomplete or invalid responses.
5. Unwilling to grant informed consent.

3.7 Tools Used

The following standardized tools were used for data collection:

Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ): Measures childhood emotional neglect by looking at the emotional support, care, and validation kids got (or didn't get) growing up.

Self-Disclosure Index (SDI): Assesses how openly young adults share their emotions, thoughts, and feelings in close relationships.

Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS): Evaluates overall satisfaction in romantic relationships, covering aspects like trust, closeness, and happiness.

4. Procedure

We gathered data via an online Google Forms survey. Before starting, we explained the study's purpose to participants and guaranteed their confidentiality and anonymity. They gave electronic informed consent prior to filling out the questionnaire. The Google Form consisted of four sections:

1. Demographic details (age, gender, relationship duration, locality)
2. Childhood Trauma Questionnaire

3. Self-Disclosure Index
4. Relationship Assessment Scale

Participants were instructed to answer all questions honestly and independently. The responses were automatically recorded and stored securely. A total of 300 complete responses were collected and used for statistical analysis.

4.1 Ethical Considerations

We adhered strictly to ethical guidelines throughout the study:

Informed Consent

Participants received clear details on the study's nature and purpose before taking part.

Confidentiality

All personal information stayed private and was used solely for research.

Anonymity

No identifying details like names or contact info were collected.

Voluntary Participation

Taking part was entirely optional, with the right to withdraw anytime without consequences.

Non-Maleficence

We took steps to avoid any psychological harm or distress.

Data Protection

Data was securely stored and used only for academic purposes.

4.2 Statistical Analysis

We analysed the data using SPSS software. Descriptive stats like means and standard deviations helped summarize the key variables. Correlation analysis then checked the relationships between childhood emotional neglect, self-disclosure, and relationship satisfaction.

5. Results and Interpretation

The section covers the statistical analysis and findings from the data, exploring how childhood emotional neglect ties into self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction for young adults. We used descriptive statistics and Pearson's product-moment correlations for the analysis. The sample included 300 young adults from Delhi and the NCR region.

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were computed to examine the distribution of scores for childhood emotional neglect, self-disclosure, and relationship satisfaction.

Table 1: *Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (N = 300)*

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Childhood Emotional Neglect	300	0	25	14.44	5.44
Self-Disclosure	300	12	60	36.47	8.70
Relationship Satisfaction	300	7	35	22.31	6.34

Explanation

Most participants experienced moderate childhood emotional neglect and reported moderate levels of self-disclosure along with relationship satisfaction.

5.2 Correlation Analysis

We ran Pearson's product-moment correlations to check links between childhood emotional neglect, self-disclosure, and relationship satisfaction.

Table 2: *Correlation Matrix of Study Variables (N = 300)*

Variables	Childhood Emotional Neglect	Self-Disclosure	Relationship Satisfaction
Childhood Emotional Neglect	1	.147	.152
Self-Disclosure	.147	1	.385
Relationship Satisfaction	.152	.385	1

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Relationship between Childhood Emotional Neglect and Self-Disclosure

A statistically significant correlation was found between childhood emotional neglect and self-disclosure ($r = .147$, $p < .05$).

Interpretation

This result indicates that childhood emotional neglect is significantly related to self-disclosure among young adults, although the strength of the relationship is weak.

Explanation

This finding suggests that childhood emotional experiences influence how individuals express emotions and share personal information in their adult relationships.

Relationship between Childhood Emotional Neglect and Relationship Satisfaction

A statistically significant correlation was found between childhood emotional neglect and relationship satisfaction ($r = .152, p < .05$).

Interpretation

The findings indicate that childhood emotional neglect has a significant relationship with relationship satisfaction among young adults.

Explanation

This suggests that emotional experiences in childhood may shape perceptions of trust, closeness, and satisfaction in adult romantic relationships.

Relationship between Self-Disclosure and Relationship Satisfaction

A statistically significant positive correlation was found between self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction ($r = .385, p < .01$).

Interpretation

This indicates that higher levels of self-disclosure are associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction.

Explanation

This finding implies that individuals who openly communicate their feelings and thoughts tend to experience more fulfilling and satisfying relationships.

Summary of Results

1. Childhood emotional neglect showed a significant relationship with self-disclosure.
2. Childhood emotional neglect showed a significant relationship with relationship satisfaction.
3. Self-disclosure showed a strong positive relationship with relationship satisfaction.

6. Discussion

This study explored childhood emotional neglect's influence on self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction during young adulthood. Childhood emotional neglect—a covert maltreatment involving caregivers' failure to offer responsiveness, affirmation, and emotional support—shapes adult attachment, regulation, and relational skills, as prior research indicates.

Young adulthood, defined by intimate partnership formation and emotional reliance, amplifies these effects. Self-disclosure drives trust, closeness, and fulfilment in romance, yet CEN survivors often struggle with emotional expression, interpersonal trust, and relational health.

Employing a quantitative approach, this investigation tested associations among childhood emotional neglect, self-disclosure, and relationship satisfaction in young adults via validated psychometric tools.

6.1 Key Findings from the Quantitative Study

This study uncovered significant connections between our main variables: childhood emotional neglect, self-disclosure, and relationship satisfaction.

- Childhood emotional neglect showed a significant link with self-disclosure.
- It also linked significantly with relationship satisfaction.
- Self-disclosure had a strong positive tie to relationship satisfaction.

Descriptive stats revealed moderate levels across the board—moderate childhood emotional neglect, self-disclosure, and relationship satisfaction. The correlations confirm these variables influence each other meaningfully.

Overall, the results back the idea that early emotional experiences shape how we open up and connect in adulthood.

6.2 Interpretation of Findings

Childhood Emotional Neglect and Self-Disclosure

The study found a significant relationship between childhood emotional neglect and self-disclosure. This suggests that experiences of emotional neglect during childhood are associated with patterns of emotional sharing in young adulthood.

Individuals who grow up in emotionally neglectful environments may not learn effective ways to express emotions or communicate personal feelings. As a result, they may struggle with openness and vulnerability in their romantic relationships. Emotional neglect can hinder the development of emotional awareness and trust, which are essential components of self-disclosure.

This finding highlights the long-term psychological impact of early emotional deprivation on adult interpersonal behaviour.

Childhood Emotional Neglect and Relationship Satisfaction

The findings also revealed a significant connection between childhood emotional neglect and relationship satisfaction. This shows how those early emotional experiences influence feelings of closeness, security, and overall happiness in romantic partnerships.

Young adults who experienced emotional neglect may develop insecure attachment patterns, which can affect their ability to form stable and fulfilling relationships. Difficulties in emotional communication, fear of rejection, and low emotional confidence may reduce their overall relationship satisfaction.

This interpretation aligns with psychological theories emphasising the role of childhood emotional environments in shaping adult relational functioning.

Self-Disclosure and Relationship Satisfaction

We also found a strong positive link between self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction. This indicates that individuals who engage in open and honest emotional communication with their partners experience higher levels of satisfaction in their relationships.

Self-disclosure promotes trust, emotional intimacy, and mutual understanding. When partners feel safe to express their thoughts and feelings, relationship quality improves. This finding reinforces the importance of emotional openness as a key factor in maintaining healthy and satisfying romantic relationships.

The result suggests that self-disclosure may act as a psychological mechanism linking early emotional experiences to adult relationship outcomes.

Integration of Findings

Taken together, the findings suggest that childhood emotional neglect influences self-disclosure patterns, which in turn affect relationship satisfaction in young adulthood. Early emotional deprivation may lead to difficulties in emotional expression, which can negatively impact relationship quality.

These interconnected patterns show how childhood emotional development sets the stage for adult emotional skills and romantic connections. The findings really drive home why emotional support and validation matter so much early on for healthy growth.

Implications of the Study

The findings of the present study have important implications for mental health professionals, educators, and relationship counsellors. Understanding the impact of childhood emotional neglect can help in designing interventions that focus on improving emotional expression, communication skills, and relationship satisfaction among young adults.

Psychological interventions aimed at increasing emotional awareness and self-disclosure may help individuals overcome the long-term effects of emotional neglect and build healthier relationships.

7. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

Conclusion

This study explored how childhood emotional neglect influences self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction in young adulthood. Through a quantitative approach, we surveyed

300 young adults from Delhi and NCR using validated psych tools, focusing on links between childhood emotional neglect, self-disclosure, and relationship satisfaction.

Key findings showed significant connections: childhood emotional neglect with self-disclosure, neglect with relationship satisfaction, and self-disclosure with satisfaction. It all points to early emotional experiences shaping how adults express feelings and navigate relationships.

Emotional neglect—lacking caregiver support, validation, or responsiveness—seems to linger, altering emotional sharing and romantic closeness. Young adults with this history often show lower self-disclosure and satisfaction, hinting that early voids affect lifelong dynamics.

We also confirmed self-disclosure's strong tie to relationship happiness. Sharing thoughts, feelings, and experiences builds trust, intimacy, and understanding—core to thriving partnerships.

In the end, this work spotlights childhood emotional neglect's lasting effects and the power of open communication in young adult relationships. It adds solid evidence linking early emotions to later relational success.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the meaningful findings of the present study, certain limitations must be acknowledged.

- 1. Limited Geographical Scope:** The sample for the study was drawn only from Delhi and NCR. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalised to young adults from other regions of India or to populations with different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.
- 2. Use of Self-Report Measures:** All variables were assessed using self-report questionnaires. Such measures are subject to social desirability bias, inaccurate recall, and subjective interpretation. Participants may not have reported their childhood experiences or relationship satisfaction with complete objectivity.
- 3. Cross-Sectional Research Design:** The study employed a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to establish causal relationships between childhood emotional neglect, self-disclosure, and relationship satisfaction. The findings only indicate associations among variables and do not confirm cause-and-effect relationships.
- 4. Sample Characteristics:** The majority of participants were young adults who were currently involved in romantic relationships for more than six months. Therefore, the results may not be applicable to individuals who are single or in short-term relationships.

5. **Online Mode of Data Collection:** Data were collected using Google Forms, which may have excluded individuals without access to the internet or those unfamiliar with digital platforms. This could have introduced sampling bias.
6. **Recall Bias:** Childhood emotional neglect was measured based on participants' retrospective reports. Such recollections may be influenced by memory distortions or current emotional states, thereby affecting the accuracy of responses.
7. **Limited Variables Included:** The study focused only on three variables: childhood emotional neglect, self-disclosure, and relationship satisfaction. Other important psychological variables such as attachment style, emotional regulation, personality traits, and mental health status were not included.
8. **Cultural Considerations:** Although standardized tools were used, they were developed primarily in Western cultural contexts. Cultural differences in emotional expression and relationship norms may have influenced the responses of participants.

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