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Anxious attachment as a predictor of adult childlessness

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The aim of this study was to test the hypothesis that childhood attachment predicts whether a person will have children later in life. Being a parent is considered a high-value status and an intrinsic part of the human life cycle. However, childlessness has increased substantially in recent decades in developed parts of the world. It is possible that insecure childhood attachment has contributed to this phenomenon, but this hypothesis has been relatively little explored. This study is a cross-sectional survey of 394 men and women aged over 50 years old, stratified by geographical UK region, from an online research panel, and analysed using hierarchical logistic regression. Validated measures of childhood attachment and other psychological and demographic factors were used. The main finding was that, independent of the impact of other variables (age, sex, education level, marital status, life stress, health-related quality of life, mental positivity, and avoidant attachment style), people who were childless were significantly more likely to have developed an anxious attachment to their primary caregiver in childhood. This study highlights the importance of healthy bonding in childhood and is the first to demonstrate the significance of anxious childhood attachment as a predictor of producing children in one's lifetime.

Keywords: ageing; anxious attachment; childlessness; parenthood; social psychology