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Anxious attachment predicts childlessness in later life

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Hypothesis

Does childhood attachment predict childlessness in later life?

Background

Childlessness has increased substantially in recent decades.

Most psychological research has focused on the impact of infertility.

Diagnosis of infertility can have a significant impact on mental and physical health.

However, many factors effect childlessness including upbringing, education level, economics, gender, and relationships.

Method

Online cross-sectional survey.

Sample: 394 people aged over 50 years old.

Men: 237 men (age: 76.9 + 7.5): 195 parents & 42 non-parents.

Women: 157 women (76.8 + 7.4): 125 parents & 32 non-parents.

Hierarchical binary logistic regression analysis.

Validated measures of childhood attachment & other psychological and demographic factors.

Sample drawn from *Lightspeed* - a certified digital data collection company.

Stratified by geographical UK region.

Instruments deployed

Attachment: The Relationship Structures questionnaire (ECR-RS)

Health-Related Quality of Life: MOS 36-Item Short Form Health Survey

Mental positivity: Positive Mindset Index

Stressful events: Life changes scaling

Survey: *Qualtrics* survey software

Data analysed using SPSS statistical software, Version 22

Results

Anxious attachment style was associated with increased odds of being childless (OR = 1.772 [1.09-2.88]; $p < .02$) independent of demographic & psychological variables.

It cannot be explained by HRQoL, PMI, or the impact of recent life stress.

No significant influence of educational level on being a parent or not.

Medical problems associated with fertility (of oneself or partner) were not a significant predictor of childlessness.

Limitations

Sample almost completely White & Heterosexual.

Why you should care

Adult children provide 92% of informal care for parents.

In the UK by 2030 there will be at least 2 million childless people over 65 years.

Older childless adults are at risk of depression, ill health, increased mortality, loneliness and social isolation.

Implications

Understanding of lifespan development.

For interventions in relationship counselling and other therapeutic settings.

Thank you!

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