Relationship Commitment in Emerging Adulthood: The Roles of Adverse Childhood Experiences and Hedonistic Motivation

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the influence of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and hedonistic motivation as predictors of relationship commitment among emerging adults at the University of Lagos, Nigeria. Using a quantitative cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 375 undergraduate students (182 males, 193 females) aged 18-29 years through convenience sampling. Participants completed standardised measures including the Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire (ACE-Q), the Hedonic sub-scale of the Hedonic and Eudaimonic Motives for Activities (HEMA) Scale, and the Relationship Commitment Scale (RCS). Results revealed that adverse childhood experiences alone showed no significant relationship with commitment, though the trend was negative. Surprisingly, hedonistic motivation significantly predicted higher relationship commitment, explaining 7.3% of variance. When examined together, both ACEs and hedonistic motivation significantly influenced commitment, explaining 8.4% of total variance. Significant gender differences emerged, with females demonstrating higher commitment than males. These findings challenge traditional assumptions that hedonism undermines commitment, suggesting instead that among educated emerging adults, pleasure-seeking within relationships may actually enhance commitment. The emergence of ACEs as a significant negative predictor only in the combined model indicates a suppressor effect, highlighting the complex relationship between childhood adversity and current motivational patterns. The study reveals that modern relationship commitment among Nigerian emerging adults is influenced less by traditional duty-based models and more by satisfaction-seeking behaviours, while childhood adversity creates vulnerabilities that interact with other psychological factors. These findings have important implications for relationship counselling, youth development programs, and understanding the evolving relationship dynamics in contemporary society.

Keywords: Relationship commitment, adverse childhood experiences, hedonistic motivation, emerging adults, gender differences.

Background of the Study

Every adult possesses a story formed during childhood which produces enduring effects on how we relate to others, especially in romantic relationships. Emerging adults today face numerous challenges when they

try to establish long-term relationships. People differ in their relationship approaches because some choose emotional closeness and stability but others either avoid intimacy or fear openness or choose short-term pleasure instead of long-lasting bonds. Our childhood experiences determine the extent to which we can develop and maintain committed relationships.

Relationship commitment represents the emotional and psychological intention to maintain an ongoing connection with a partner over time. It is a fundamental factor in relational health. The development of trust, together with emotional availability and a willingness to invest despite challenges, stands as a necessity for this commitment. Emerging adults who faced childhood adversity through abuse or neglect or unstable family environments tend to struggle with meeting the demands of commitment. Research indicates that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) disrupt emotional development while altering how people interact with intimacy and emotional bonding in adulthood (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Khanna & Kumari, 2024; Akinwale et al., 2025).

The motivational patterns which emerge from childhood experiences also determine how young people interact with romantic relationships. The pursuit of immediate pleasure through hedonistic motivation affects how people perceive long-term commitment in relationships. The pursuit of enjoyment remains a typical human desire, but when it functions as the primary defence strategy, it may block the necessary qualities of patience, emotional depth and sacrifice needed to develop enduring romantic relationships (Hofmann et al., 2012; Bertrams & Dickhäuser, 2019).

Commitment within a relationship is important for establishing the quality and longevity of a relationship, particularly among emerging adults. Commitment is

defined as the readiness of a person to invest, stay faithful, and keep a long-term relationship with a love partner. With more frequent instances of casual relationships and short-term pleasures, it is now more critical than ever to understand the determinants for a person's commitment within a relationship.

ACEs describe a variety of forms of abuse, neglect, or family dysfunction that a person might experience during their childhood. These experiences have been found to disrupt emotional regulation, trust, and attachment, which are important elements involved in healthy relationship commitment (Afifi et al., 2008; Dube et al., 2010: Akinwale & Ojakorotu 2024). A background of early traumatic experience can cause individuals not to open up emotionally, or they might start developing avoidance behaviour within intimate relationships for fear of being hurt once more. Two of the factors that have been found to determine commitment rates among emerging adults are adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and hedonistic motivation.

While the health field has increasingly recognised the influence of ACEs on physical and mental outcomes, interventions most often remain limited to addressing surface symptoms rather than their underlying causes. For example, despite research correlating ACEs with long-term mental health problems such as PTSD, depression, and drug use (Green et al., 2010; Chung et al., 2008), few health providers screen for ACEs as part of routine medical exams (Weinreb et al., 2010). This short-sighted strategy neglects deeper behavioural and relational impacts ACEs can have, including the way people establish or struggle with love attachment and commitment. On the other hand, hedonistic motivation, a desire for pleasure and avoidance of pain, can influence relationship

choice and commitment depth, too. In a society that values instant gratification, some will centre on self-gratification over shared investment or long-term stability within their relationships. This might show up as a resistance to commitment, fear of emotional responsibility, or a pattern of regarding relationships as a short-term means of entertainment rather than a solid partnership (Hofmann et al., 2012).

There is also evidence through emerging psychological research from within individuals who experience early trauma that they develop intense hedonistic tendencies as a coping mechanism for unresolved emotional pain (Shin et al., 2018; Gerin et al., 2019). In essence, the pursuit of one's pleasures is a replacement for emotional intimacy, thereby precluding commitment. This is a double whammy effect between one's history (ACEs) and contemporary motivational needs (hedonism), both of which might limit one's capacity for, or desire for, commitment to a relationship. This association between early negative experiences and hedonistic inclinations accounts for why some emerging adults might experience difficulty being consistent and faithful within their love lives. In place of establishing emotional connections through mutual trust and long-term compatibility, some might value excitement, attention, or sex, usually dropping each relationship once it loses its novelty factor. This behaviour over a period might create a cycle of unstable relations, emotional discontent, and failure to maintain commitment.

There is heightened concern in Nigeria and most African societies regarding the instability of loving relations, increasing rates of break-up among young people, and movement towards casual, less committed forms of dating. Even then, there is sparse empirical research on the psychological underpinnings of the trend, especially how

early life adversity and motivational styles play a role in these relational difficulties among young Nigerians. Most research on ACEs and commitment is from Western societies, and thus there is limited understanding of the manifestation of these problems within local cultural contexts where family make-up, social expectations, and financial stressors interact differently with childhood adversity and adult behaviour.

This study aims to fill those gaps by examining the combined and individual effects of adverse childhood experiences and hedonistic motivation on relationship commitment among emerging adults. With a focus on university students, a demographic transitioning through emotional growth, identity formation, and relationship experience. The research sheds light on how early experience and contemporary motivational tendencies influence relational choices. The findings of this research can inform psychological interventions, secondary schooling guidance counselling, as well as public health interventions for enhancing emotional resiliency and healthier relationship tendencies among Nigerian emerging adults.

Statement of the Problem

In present-day Nigeria, it is becoming a challenge for young people to maintain long-term, healthy relationships based on emotions. While the obvious explanations of not being "ready" to settle down or simply enjoying the experience are given easily, more profound emotional tendencies that stem from the past go unattended (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016; Khanna & Kumari, 2024). Most of the available research on the aetiology of commitment problems is aimed at broad psychological pathology or relationship satisfaction, with no attention given to how early experiences, especially traumatising ones, may influence the capability of

establishing and maintaining secure, stable intimate relationships (Davila et al., 2016; Anda et al., 2006). Even if early adversity is addressed, it is largely for mental illness and physical health outcomes rather than intimate relationship function (Merrick et al., 2019). In addition, excitement-seeking, immediate gratification, and emotional escape behavioural patterns have become prevalent among emerging adults. These are not usually investigated as relationship commitment obstacles based on deeper emotional histories (Hofmann et al., 2012; Bertrams & Dickhäuser, 2019). Most people are torn between their desire for true connection and their pursuit of hedonic activities that compromise their potential for long-term relationship formation.

A great deal of information concerning these problems is obtained through Western society research (Felitti et al., 1998; WHO, 2018). In the Nigerian context where young people tend to grow up in environments characterized by family disruption, poverty, violence, or social disregard, there is limited empirical data to associate early life experiences with contemporary relationship trends. This relative lack of research attention creates a critical gap in the existing literature on the consequences of childhood adversity and the draw of hedonistic activities that interact to influence relationship commitment amongst emerging adults in Nigeria. This study aims to investigate the influence of adverse childhood experiences and hedonistic motivation on relationship commitment among emerging adults.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the influence of adverse childhood experiences on relationship commitment among emerging adults.
2. Assess the influence of hedonistic motivation on relationship commitment among emerging adults.

3. Determine the combined influence of adverse childhood experiences and hedonistic motivation on relationship commitment among emerging adults.
4. Determine whether gender differences exist in the level of relationship commitment among emerging adults.

Relationship Commitment

Relationship commitment is the dependent variable in this study. It refers to an individual's willingness and determination to remain emotionally, psychologically, and sometimes physically connected to their romantic partner over time. In simple terms, it is the level of seriousness and effort someone puts into making a relationship last, even when there are challenges.

According to Rusbult (1980), commitment is a key element in understanding how romantic relationships grow and survive. The Investment Model of Commitment proposed by Rusbult (1983) explains that three major factors influence commitment: the level of satisfaction in the relationship, the perceived quality of alternatives (whether someone thinks they could find someone better), and the size of the investment they have made in the relationship (like time, emotions, money, shared memories, etc.). When these three factors are high, commitment is likely to be strong. Since many emerging adults are starting to investigate long-term relationships, emotional intimacy, and personal identity at this time, relationship commitment is particularly crucial for them. However, peer pressure, social media exposure, erratic emotions, and personal insecurities can all contribute to this age group's unstable commitment. According to research, high levels of commitment have been associated with more stable and healthy relationships.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) serve as an independent variable in this study. ACEs are defined as stressful or traumatic events occurring before the age of 18, which include various forms of abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual), neglect, and household dysfunction. These may involve growing up in a household where there is domestic violence, substance abuse, parental separation, incarceration, or mental illness (Felitti et al., 1998). These experiences have been shown to produce lasting effects on an individual's psychological, emotional, and relational development, persisting into adulthood.

A growing body of research suggests that ACEs significantly influence how individuals form and maintain interpersonal relationships, particularly romantic ones. Early exposure to trauma often disrupts the development of secure attachment patterns, which are crucial for forming stable, trusting relationships in adulthood (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Children who grow up in environments characterized by fear, neglect, or instability are more likely to develop insecure attachment styles, such as anxious or avoidant attachment. These individuals may either distance themselves emotionally from others to avoid vulnerability or, conversely, display dependency and a fear of abandonment in their relationships (Akinwale & Aroyewun, 2023).

As individuals transition into young adulthood, the psychological and emotional consequences of ACEs frequently manifest in their romantic relationships. For example, those who experienced emotional neglect may have difficulty expressing emotions or trusting their partners, while individuals exposed to household conflict may replicate similar patterns of dysfunction in their own relationships (Renteria, 2017). These difficulties often result in reduced relationship and life satisfaction, impaired communication, emotional withdrawal, and

challenges in maintaining long-term romantic commitments (Akinwale & Ojakorotu, 2024). Despite being a worldwide occurrence, adverse childhood experiences are especially pertinent in Nigeria, where poverty, broken homes, physical punishment, and exposure to domestic violence are still commonplace. Even though these problems are common, society is still not well-informed about the long-term psychological impacts of childhood trauma. As a result, a large number of emerging adults might not be aware that unresolved issues from their childhood are contributing to their challenges with intimacy, trust, and commitment in romantic relationships.

Hedonistic Motivation

Hedonistic motivation is an independent variable in this study. It refers to an individual's drive to seek pleasure and avoid pain, often guiding behaviour towards experiences that provide immediate satisfaction, enjoyment, or gratification (Kahneman, Wakker, & Sarin, 1997). This form of motivation is based on the foundational assumption that people are naturally inclined to pursue what feels good and to steer away from discomfort or distress. It is deeply rooted in classical hedonistic philosophy, which suggests that pleasure is the highest good and ultimate aim of human life. Hedonistic motivation is often associated with extrinsic goals such as physical enjoyment, novelty-seeking, and self-indulgence, and it contrasts with intrinsic motivation, which is focused on internal growth, autonomy, and personal fulfilment (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Individuals with high levels of hedonistic motivation are more likely to prioritise short-term rewards over long-term benefits, making decisions that maximise present pleasure even at the expense of future outcomes.

Pertaining to human behavior, hedonistic motivation plays a big role in

shaping different areas of our lives, like what we buy, how we live, and how we connect with others. It works through our feelings, pulling us toward things that make us happy or help us escape from negative emotions (Higgins, 1997). This kind of motivation is often spontaneous, focused on pleasure, and aims to steer clear of boredom, discomfort, or emotional unhappiness. Also, Kahneman (1999) makes a distinction between decision utility and experienced utility, pointing out that people frequently base their choices on the pleasure they expect to feel rather than on their overall well-being. This means that individuals motivated hedonistically may engage in behaviours without necessarily considering their long-term consequences or the deeper emotional implications of their actions. Their decisions are largely influenced by how rewarding or pleasurable an activity seems at the moment.

Theoretical Review

Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory (Erikson, 1963)

Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory presents a lifespan approach to personality development, consisting of eight sequential stages, each marked by a central psychological conflict that must be resolved for healthy development to occur. These conflicts are deeply influenced by early relational experiences and the surrounding social environment. Of particular relevance to this study is the sixth stage, *Intimacy vs. Isolation*, which typically emerges during young adulthood, the developmental period when individuals seek to form deep, emotionally connected, and enduring relationships.

In this stage, Erikson (1963) argues that successful resolution of the conflict involves the ability to form close, committed, and reciprocal relationships with others. It is not merely about sexual or romantic involvement but about the

emotional maturity and vulnerability necessary to build long-term bonds. Conversely, failure to resolve this stage results in isolation, emotional detachment, fear of commitment, and feelings of loneliness or inadequacy. Crucially, Erikson emphasised that each psychosocial stage builds upon the outcomes of the previous one. For instance, an individual must resolve the Trust vs. Mistrust stage in infancy by developing a sense of safety and reliability in their caregivers. If this stage is compromised, such as through adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) like neglect, abuse, or household dysfunction, then foundational issues of trust, autonomy, and initiative may remain unresolved. These unresolved issues accumulate and often resurface in young adulthood, impairing an individual's ability to form healthy intimate connections.

ACEs can severely disrupt the early psychosocial stages by creating environments where safety, stability, and emotional responsiveness are lacking. Children exposed to such environments may develop a persistent sense of mistrust, emotional insecurity, and low self-worth. As these children grow into adults, they may avoid vulnerability out of fear of betrayal or rejection, which makes them prone to isolation rather than intimacy. This makes forming and maintaining committed romantic relationships particularly challenging. Furthermore, emerging adults with histories of ACEs may experience difficulty with emotional regulation, interpersonal boundaries, and self-identity all of which are critical in developing and sustaining intimacy. Instead of pursuing emotionally fulfilling partnerships, they may gravitate toward short-term relationships or avoid closeness altogether, thus reinforcing isolation. Adding to this, hedonistic motivation, often characterised by present-focused, pleasure-seeking behaviours, may

also reflect an unconscious defence mechanism to cope with the unresolved pain from earlier developmental stages. Instead of engaging in the emotional labour required to form intimate bonds, such individuals might prioritise immediate gratification, adventure, or self-focused goals, further distancing themselves from the commitment required in long-term relationships.

Literature Review

In a study by Deci and Ryan (2000), researchers took a closer look at how intrinsic and extrinsic (hedonistic) motivations impact relationships. They discovered that people driven by intrinsic values, like personal growth and connection, tended to experience greater satisfaction and commitment in their relationships compared to those who were more focused on external rewards, such as pleasure and novelty. Gonzalez et al. (2019) investigated hedonistic values and delay of gratification in romantic decision-making among college students. Their results revealed that individuals high in hedonistic motivation were significantly less committed in exclusive relationships and more likely to endorse "exit" strategies when faced with relational conflict. Similarly, the study by Joireman et al. (2006) delved into the effects of hedonistic motivation and the consideration of future consequences (CFC) in romantic partnerships. They found that participants who had strong hedonistic tendencies and low CFC scores were less committed, more prone to infidelity, and favoured short-term relationships.

Arnett (2000) examined emerging adulthood as a unique developmental stage marked by exploration and instability, particularly in romantic relationships. His research indicated that many emerging adults shy away from commitment, often prioritising personal freedom, novelty, and immediate gratification, which are traits that align with hedonistic motivation. In another

study, Löckenhoff et al. (2009) investigated how future time perspective, which is tied to delayed gratification, influences interpersonal commitment. Their findings revealed that individuals who are more focused on the present and have a short-term outlook, often associated with hedonistic motivation, tend to undervalue long-term relationship goals. Kaufman-Parks et al. (2023) examined how various contextual factors, like the relationship environment and socio-psychological background, interact with ACEs to influence intimate partner violence (IPV) perpetration. They found that individuals with adverse early-life experiences, especially when faced with additional stressors, were at a higher risk for engaging in unhealthy relationship behaviours. Lastly, Cheung et al. (2021) investigated the role of mindfulness as a mediator between ACEs and psychological well-being. Their results indicated that mindfulness training could help mitigate trauma-related mental health issues, ultimately fostering better emotional regulation and healthier relationship dynamics. The literature has thus revealed that there is a gap in the existing studies on how Adverse Childhood Experiences and Hedonistic Motivation can serve as predictors of healthy relationships among emerging adults

METHOD

This study was conducted among undergraduate students at the University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos State, Nigeria. The University was selected because of its accessibility and population diversity. The setting was chosen to reflect the broader population of Nigerian emerging adults going through the process of emotional development, academic responsibilities, and romantic experiences to be examined in the context of early life adversity and motivational tendencies.

This research utilises a quantitative and cross-sectional survey design. This approach allows for easy collection of data from a large number of participants at a single point in time and is suitable for examining relationships between constructs like adverse childhood experiences, hedonistic motivation, and relationship commitment without manipulating any variables. The study employs a quantitative cross-sectional design involving 381 undergraduate students selected through a convenience sampling technique. Cochran's sample size formula was used to calculate the required sample size, considering an undergraduate population of 35,436 (Pocket Statistics, 2020),

A total of 381 questionnaires were administered, which is sufficient to ensure adequate representation and statistical power. Data were gathered using a structured self-report questionnaire with four sections:

Section A: Demographics

This section will collect basic participant information like age, gender, academic level, and faculty.

Section B: Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

This section utilises the ACE Questionnaire by Felitti et al. (1998), comprising 10 items covering abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction experienced before the age of 18. Responses are binary (Yes/No), and the ACE score is simply the count of “yes” responses (range 0–10). Higher scores indicate greater exposure to childhood adversity. The scale has a reported Cronbach’s alpha of .88.

Hedonistic Motivation

This section utilises the Hedonic subscale of the Hedonic and Eudaimonic Motives for Activities (HEMA) Scale developed by Huta and Ryan (2010). The subscale comprises several items designed to assess the extent to which individuals

engage in activities primarily for pleasure, enjoyment, and comfort. Responses are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much) with no reverse items, allowing for nuanced measurement of participants' hedonic motivational orientation. Higher scores on the hedonic subscale indicate a greater tendency to be motivated by hedonic goals.

Relationship Commitment

This section utilises the 15-item Relationship Commitment Scale (RCS) developed by Stanley and Markman (1992), which assesses an individual's emotional and cognitive dedication to maintaining a long-term romantic relationship. The scale captures both personal desires to stay in the relationship and recognition of its long-term significance. Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) with no reverse items. Higher scores represent higher relationship commitment (0-75)

Procedure

The study used primary ethics, where the participants filled the consent forms individually; there was no institutional ethical approval because the study is non-invasive and time-constrained. Participants were recruited from various faculties and assured of confidentiality and voluntary participation. The questionnaires were administered in person, and clear instructions were given. Respondents were allowed to complete the forms anonymously to reduce response bias. All participants were provided with information about the study's purpose, procedures, duration, and potential risks and benefits. All questionnaires were administered anonymously, with no personally identifiable information collected. Data collection is stored and available upon request to authorised research personnel only.

Data Analysis

Data collected was used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27. Descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, and standard deviation) will be used to describe the demographic characteristics and scores on each variable. Inferential statistical techniques will be used to test the hypotheses.

RESULTS

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 1: *There will be a significant positive relationship between adverse childhood experiences and relationship commitment among emerging adults.*

The statistical test used was the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Analysis. The results are presented in the table below.

Table 1: Pearson Correlation Analysis showing the relationship between adverse childhood experiences and relationship commitment

Variables	ACEs	
ACEs	1	
Relationship Commitment	-.092	

A Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between adverse childhood experiences and relationship commitment. The results revealed no statistically significant relationship between adverse childhood experiences and relationship commitment ($r = -.092$, $p = .077$). The correlation coefficient indicates a weak negative relationship between the two variables, suggesting that as adverse childhood experiences increase, relationship commitment tends to slightly decrease, though this relationship was not statistically significant at the conventional alpha level of .05. Therefore, hypothesis 1 is rejected, as there was no significant positive relationship between adverse childhood experiences and

relationship commitment among emerging adults. In fact, the direction of the relationship was opposite to what was hypothesized, showing a non-significant negative trend.

Hypothesis 2: *Hedonistic motivation will significantly predict relationship commitment among emerging adults.*

The statistical test used was a Linear Regression Analysis. The results are presented in the tables below.

Table 2: Linear Regression Analysis showing the influence of hedonistic motivation on relationship commitment

Variables	B	SE	β	t	p	R^2
Constant)	42.258	2.243		18.837	.000	
HEMA	.489	.090	.271	5.439	.000	.073

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the influence of hedonistic motivation on relationship commitment. The results revealed that the regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 373) = 29.579$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .073$, indicating that hedonistic motivation explained 7.3% of the variance in relationship commitment among emerging adults. The analysis showed that hedonistic motivation significantly predicted relationship commitment ($\beta = .271$, $t = 5.439$, $p < .001$), with a positive relationship indicating that higher levels of hedonistic motivation are associated with increased relationship commitment. Therefore, hypothesis 2 is accepted, confirming that hedonistic motivation significantly predicts relationship commitment among emerging adults.

Hypothesis 3: *There will be a significant combined influence of adverse childhood experiences and hedonistic motivation on relationship commitment among emerging adults.*

The statistical test used was the Multiple Linear Regression Analysis. The results are presented in the tables below.

Table 3: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis showing the combined influence of adverse childhood experiences and hedonistic motivation on relationship commitment

Variables	B	SE	β	t	p	R^2
(Constant)	43.373	2.295		18.897	.000	-
ACEs	-.721	.343	-.104	-2.103	.036	-
Hedonistic Motivation	.498	.090	.276	5.556	.000	-
Model	-	-	-	-	-	.084

A multiple linear regression was conducted to examine the combined influence of adverse childhood experiences and hedonistic motivation on relationship commitment. The results revealed that the overall model was statistically significant, $F(2, 372) = 17.136$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .084$, indicating that adverse childhood experiences and hedonistic motivation combined explained 8.4% of the variance in relationship commitment among emerging adults. Examination of individual predictors showed that both adverse childhood experiences ($\beta = -.104$, $t = -2.103$, $p = .036$) and hedonistic motivation ($\beta = .276$, $t = 5.556$, $p < .001$) were significant predictors of relationship commitment. Adverse childhood experiences demonstrated a negative relationship with relationship commitment, while hedonistic motivation showed a positive relationship. Therefore, hypothesis 3 is accepted, confirming that adverse childhood experiences and hedonistic motivation have a significant combined influence on relationship commitment among emerging adults.

Hypothesis 4: *There will be a significant gender difference in relationship commitment among emerging adults, such that females will have higher commitment scores than males.*

The statistical test used was the Independent Samples T-test. The results are presented in the table below.

Table 4: Independent t-test showing gender differences in relationship commitment

	N	M	SD	df	t	p
Male	182	52.4	13.8	373	-.2077	.03

193	55.3	12.7	-	-	The

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to examine the differences in relationship satisfaction between male and female married individuals. The results revealed a statistically significant difference in relationship commitment between males (M = 52.45, SD = 13.81) and females (M = 55.30, SD = 12.71), t(373) = -2.077, p = .038. The effect size was small (Cohen's d = -.215), indicating a modest practical difference between the groups. As hypothesized, females demonstrated significantly higher relationship commitment scores than males, with a mean difference of 2.84 points. Therefore, hypothesis 4 is accepted., confirming that there are significant gender differences in relationship commitment among emerging adults, with females showing higher commitment levels than males.

Discussion of Findings

results revealed no statistically significant relationship between adverse childhood experiences and relationship commitment. Notably, the direction of the relationship was negative rather than positive as hypothesized, suggesting that higher adverse childhood experiences tend to be associated with slightly lower relationship commitment, though this trend did not reach statistical significance.

This finding contradicts the initial hypothesis and requires careful examination. The negative trend, though non-significant, aligns with attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), which suggests that adverse childhood experiences can disrupt the formation of secure attachment patterns, potentially leading to difficulties in forming committed relationships in adulthood. Individuals who experienced childhood adversity may develop insecure attachment styles characterised by fear of intimacy,

difficulty trusting partners, or avoidance of close relationships.

Several studies support this negative association. Research has shown that childhood trauma and adverse experiences can lead to relationship difficulties in adulthood, including lower relationship satisfaction, increased conflict, and commitment issues. The social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) suggests that children who witness or experience adverse events may internalise dysfunctional relationship patterns, which could manifest as reduced commitment in adult relationships. The lack of significance can be explained by:

Resilience Factors: The university student population may represent a resilient subset of individuals who have successfully navigated their adverse childhood experiences. Their enrolment in higher education suggests adaptive functioning that may buffer against the negative effects of childhood adversity on relationship outcomes.

1. With 79.2% of participants being single and the majority aged 18-26, many may not have had sufficient opportunity to form deeply committed relationships. The developmental stage of emerging adulthood is characterized by identity exploration and instability in romantic relationships, which may obscure the effects of childhood experiences.
2. In the Nigerian context, strong community support systems, extended family networks, and religious coping mechanisms may mitigate the impact of adverse childhood experiences on later relationship functioning. These cultural buffers could explain why the expected relationship was not significant. Measurement

Considerations: The relationship between ACEs and commitment may be more complex than a simple linear correlation, potentially involving mediating or moderating variables not captured in this analysis

3. The relationship between ACEs and commitment may be more complex than a simple linear correlation, potentially involving mediating or moderating variables not captured in this analysis.

The non-significant finding challenges simplistic models of intergenerational transmission of relationship patterns. While attachment theory and social learning theory predict that early adverse experiences shape later relationship behaviours, this study suggests that the relationship may be more nuanced, particularly in young adult populations with access to higher education and potentially greater resources for overcoming childhood adversity. The results confirmed that hedonistic motivation significantly predicted relationship commitment, explaining 7.3% of the variance in commitment levels. This positive relationship indicates that emerging adults with higher hedonistic motivation demonstrate greater relationship commitment.

This finding may initially seem counterintuitive, as hedonism is often associated with pleasure-seeking and short-term gratification rather than long-term commitment. However, several theoretical frameworks can explain this positive association:

1. Hedonistic motivation may reflect an autonomous pursuit of pleasure and well-being within relationships. Emerging adults who value pleasure and positive experiences may be more committed to relationships that fulfil these hedonic needs, viewing

their partnerships as sources of happiness and satisfaction.

2. Broaden-and-Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2001): Positive emotions associated with hedonistic experiences in relationships may broaden individuals' thought-action repertoires and build psychological resources, including commitment. The pursuit of pleasure within relationships may strengthen emotional bonds and increase investment in the partnership.

   Modern Relationship Paradigms: In contemporary young adult relationships, the pursuit of mutual pleasure, shared experiences, and personal fulfilment has become increasingly important. This "pure relationship" model (Giddens, 1992) suggests that relationships are maintained for the satisfaction they provide, with hedonistic fulfilment serving as a foundation for commitment.

Among Nigerian university students, hedonistic motivation may represent a departure from traditional, duty-based relationship models toward more individualistic, satisfaction-focused partnerships. This shift aligns with global trends in youth culture and the influence of Western relationship ideals through media and education. The university environment, with its emphasis on personal growth and exploration, may foster a connection between pleasure-seeking and relationship investment.

The positive association may also reflect the developmental stage of emerging adulthood, where identity exploration includes experimenting with different relationship styles. Emerging adults who actively pursue pleasurable experiences may be more engaged in their relationships, leading to higher commitment levels. The

results confirmed a significant combined influence, with the model explaining 8.4% of variance in relationship commitment. Notably, when examined together, adverse childhood experiences showed a significant negative relationship, while hedonistic motivation maintained its positive relationship with commitment.

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Conclusion

The emergence of ACEs as a significant negative predictor only in the combined model suggests a suppressor effect, where the inclusion of hedonistic motivation clarifies the relationship between childhood adversity and commitment. This finding supports a more complex understanding of how early experiences and current

motivations interact to shape relationship outcomes. Emerging adults with adverse childhood experiences may develop different motivational patterns in relationships. Some may adopt hedonistic approaches as a compensatory mechanism, seeking in adult relationships the pleasure and positive experiences lacking in childhood. This could explain why both variables independently contribute to commitment when examined together. The results suggest two distinct pathways to relationship commitment among emerging adults. A positive pathway through hedonistic motivation, where pleasure-seeking enhances commitment. A negative pathway from adverse childhood experiences, where early trauma undermines commitment capacity. The relatively small effect sizes suggest that while these factors influence commitment, emerging adults have considerable capacity for resilience and adaptation. The university context may provide resources and experiences that help individuals develop healthy relationship patterns despite childhood adversity.

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