

FAMILY ARCHITECTURE – THE MATRIX OF RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIO-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES IN ADOLESCENCE

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Abstract

Background: Research on family diversity frequently emphasizes structural forms, yet adolescents' socio-emotional development is more proximally shaped by relational organization (attachment, emotional communication, and support for autonomy). To integrate these layers, this paper proposes the construct of family architecture – an integrative matrix linking family structural configuration with relational processes and adolescents' socio-emotional competences.

Method: Cross-sectional survey of Romanian adolescents ($N = 250$; 16–18 years) from Olt County: two-parent families ($n = 160$), single-parent families ($n = 68$), and alternative-care settings (institutional/professional foster care; $n = 22$). Measures included the Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ), Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA; mother, father, peers), Emotional Intelligence Inventory (INEM; self-report), Friedmann Emotional Maturity Scale, and Attachment Styles and Self-Esteem Inventory (ASSI). Nonparametric tests (Kruskal–Wallis, χ^2) and multiple regression were used. Effect sizes and 95% confidence intervals (CIs) are reported where applicable.

Results: Family type was associated with attachment style distribution ($\chi^2(6) = 17.34$, $p = 0.008$, Cramer's $V = 0.19$, 95% CI [0.05, 0.25]). Significant differences by family type emerged for maternal trust ($H = 24.40$, $p < 0.001$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.09$) and communication ($H = 20.21$, $p < 0.001$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.07$), paternal trust ($H = 14.35$, $p = 0.001$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.05$) and communication ($H = 12.79$, $p = 0.002$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.04$), and maternal total attachment ($H = 12.74$, $p = 0.002$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.04$); peer attachment did not differ by family type ($ps > 0.10$). Trait emotional intelligence (INEM global and subscales) did not differ by family type (all $ps \geq .075$; $\varepsilon^2 \leq 0.01$), whereas emotional maturity showed a small difference ($H = 8.39$, $p = 0.015$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.03$). Attachment style was related to global self-esteem levels ($\chi^2(6) = 12.72$, $p = 0.048$, $V = 0.16$, 95% CI [0.00, 0.22]). In regression models controlling for parental attachment, peer attachment uniquely predicted global trait EI ($R^2 = 0.067$, $\beta = 0.162$, $p = 0.012$, $B = 0.026$, 95% CI [0.006, 0.046]) and understanding others' emotions ($R^2 = 0.066$, $\beta = 0.242$, $p < 0.001$, $B = 0.041$, 95% CI [0.019, 0.063]).

Conclusions: Findings support the family architecture framework: structural family type relates to parental attachment quality, while peer attachment may partially compensate in the domain of perceived socio-emotional competences. Given the cross-sectional, self-report design and the small alternative-care subsample, interpretations are associative and context-bound.

Keywords: family architecture, family type, attachment, adolescence, socio-emotional competences, emotional intelligence.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a developmental period marked by accelerated biological changes, increasing social complexity, and a progressive shift from parental dependence to broader relational networks. Across this transition, socio-emotional competences – such as emotional understanding, regulation, and relational functioning – are central resources for adaptation, academic engagement, and long-term well-being (Arnett, 2000). These competences develop within relational contexts that include caregivers and peers, and their formation depends not only on family structure but also on how relationships are organized in daily life.

Family research has historically described family diversity through structural indicators (*e.g.*, number of caregivers in the household, divorce, or out-of-home placement). However, structural indicators alone often have limited explanatory power because adolescents' outcomes are more proximally shaped by relational processes: emotional availability of caregivers, trust, communication patterns, and autonomy support. For example, meta-analytic evidence suggests that parenting quality and relational processes are robust correlates of adolescent adjustment, whereas the effects of structural transitions (*e.g.*, divorce) are heterogeneous and contingent on contextual mechanisms (van Dijk *et al.*, 2020).

To integrate structure and process, we propose the construct of family architecture. Family architecture refers to an integrative matrix connecting: (a) family structural configuration (family type and stability/continuity of caregiving), (b) relational organization (attachment representations and relationship quality, including trust, communication, and alienation), and (c) socio-emotional competences (*e.g.*, emotional intelligence, emotional maturity, and self-evaluative outcomes). This construct aims to move beyond a purely descriptive-structural view and foreground the relational mechanisms through which family forms become developmentally meaningful.

Adolescence is also characterized by a functional rebalancing toward peers. Peer attachment becomes increasingly salient as a secure base, a source of emotional disclosure, and a context for social learning (Delgado *et al.*, 2022). Within the family architecture framework, peers may play a compensatory role, particularly when parental relationships are strained or caregiving is disrupted.

2. FAMILY ARCHITECTURE – A CONCEPTUAL AND OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK

In this article, family architecture is defined as the configuration of structural and relational features through which adolescents experience their family environment. Structurally, family architecture captures the type of family/care arrangement (two-parent, single-parent, or alternative care). Relationally, it encompasses attachment-related representations (secure, preoccupied, dismissing, fearful), and relationship-specific dimensions of trust, emotional communication, and alienation

toward caregivers and peers. Conceptually, family architecture also includes autonomy support and emotion socialization practices; in the present dataset, autonomy support was not directly measured and is therefore treated as a theoretical component to be operationalized in future work. Socio-emotional competences are modeled as outcomes that may be shaped by both structural factors (*e.g.*, caregiver continuity) and relational mechanisms (*e.g.*, trust and communication), with peers acting as a potential compensatory resource during adolescence.

3. OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

The study aims to empirically test key links in the family architecture framework in a Romanian adolescent sample. We examined (a) how family type is associated with attachment style distribution (RSQ) and with relationship-specific attachment dimensions (IPPA), (b) whether family type is associated with adolescents' socio-emotional competences (trait emotional intelligence and emotional maturity), (c) whether attachment style is associated with self-esteem indicators, and (d) whether attachment to peers predicts emotional intelligence beyond attachment to parents.

Based on attachment theory and process-oriented family research, we formulated the following hypotheses:

H1: Family type will be associated with relational organization. Adolescents from two-parent families will report higher trust and communication (and higher total attachment) toward mother and father than those from single-parent or alternative-care settings.

H2: Family type will be associated with socio-emotional competences (emotional maturity and trait emotional intelligence). Given the increasing salience of peers, differences in emotional intelligence by family type may be attenuated.

H3: Attachment style will be associated with global self-esteem, with secure attachment linked to higher self-esteem relative to insecure styles.

H4: Peer attachment will uniquely predict trait emotional intelligence (global and interpersonal components) beyond parental attachment.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. PARTICIPANTS AND SETTING

Participants were 250 Romanian adolescents aged 16–18 years ($M = 16.98$, $SD = 0.85$) from Olt County. The sample included 131 boys (52.4%) and 119 girls (47.6%), with 109 adolescents from urban areas (43.6%) and 141 from rural areas (56.4%). With respect to caregiving arrangement, 160 participants (64.0%) lived in two-parent families, 68 (27.2%) in single-parent families, and 22 (8.8%) in alternative-care settings (institutional care and/or professional foster care; AMP). Data were collected during the 2023–2024 school year from 250 high school

students, 22 of them benefiting of child protection services. Inclusion criteria were: age 16–18 years and ability to understand and complete the questionnaires. Exclusion criteria included severe intellectual disability or inability to read/understand the items, as well as temporary inability to participate (*e.g.*, absence on the day of assessment).

4.2. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND PROCEDURE

The study adhered to the ethical principles governing psychological research and professional conduct in Romania. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. For adolescents recruited from schools, informed consent was obtained from both adolescents and their parents/legal guardians. For adolescents in alternative-care settings, consent procedures involved the legal guardian and institutional gatekeepers, in line with child protection regulations. Questionnaires were administered in Romanian in group settings in schools and, for the child protection subsample, under supervised conditions appropriate to the care context. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw without negative consequences.

4.3. MEASURES

Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ). Attachment style was assessed with the RSQ, a self-report measure capturing adult/adolescent attachment representations aligned with four prototypical styles: secure, preoccupied, dismissing, and fearful (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). The RSQ yields a categorical classification based on dominant style indices.

Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA). Relationship-specific attachment quality was assessed using the IPPA (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) for mother, father, and peers. IPPA dimensions include Trust, Communication, and Alienation, with higher total scores reflecting more secure attachment-related relationship quality (high trust and communication, low alienation). In this manuscript, we report subscale scores and total scores for each relationship target.

Emotional Intelligence Inventory (INEM). Trait emotional intelligence (self-reported emotional competences) was assessed with the INEM (Constantin, 2008). The INEM provides a global index and component scores covering intrapersonal and interpersonal emotional competences, including understanding and regulating own emotions, understanding and regulating others' emotions, and social desirability.

Friedmann Emotional Maturity Scale. Emotional maturity was assessed using the Friedmann scale (Friedmann, 1992), which provides a level-based index of emotional maturity related to affective balance, frustration tolerance, and emotional stability.

Attachment Styles and Self-Esteem Inventory (ASSI). Self-esteem indicators were assessed using the ASSI (Constantin, 2005), which yields categorical self-esteem levels (low, medium, high) as well as additional indices (self-devaluation and infatuation) used in the dataset.

4.4. DATA ANALYSIS AND TRANSPARENCY OF INFERENCE

All analyses were conducted at $\alpha = 0.05$ (two-tailed). Preliminary screening indicated deviations from normality for most scale variables, and several variables showed pronounced skewness/kurtosis, therefore between-group comparisons relied primarily on nonparametric tests.

Family type comparisons: Kruskal–Wallis tests were used to compare family type groups (two-parent, single-parent, alternative care) on attachment dimensions (IPPA) and socio-emotional outcomes (INEM, Friedmann). Effect size was indexed with epsilon-squared (ϵ^2) for Kruskal–Wallis tests. Given the small size and heterogeneity of the alternative-care group, results are interpreted cautiously and primarily at the level of overall group differences.

Associations between categorical variables: χ^2 tests were used for associations between family type and attachment style (RSQ), and between attachment style and categorical self-esteem levels. Effect size was indexed with Cramer's V, and 95% CIs for V were derived from noncentral χ^2 confidence limits.

Multiple testing control: To reduce Type I error inflation, Benjamini–Hochberg false discovery rate (FDR) correction ($q = 0.05$) was applied within families of related tests (*e.g.*, the set of IPPA family-type comparisons). Both unadjusted p-values and FDR-adjusted q-values are reported when relevant.

Predictive analyses: Multiple linear regression (enter method) was used to test whether peer attachment predicts emotional intelligence outcomes beyond attachment to mother and father. Multicollinearity was examined via tolerance and variance inflation factors (VIF). Other regression assumptions (normality and homoscedasticity of residuals; influential cases) should be examined in future replications with full diagnostic reporting.

Missing data: The analyzed variables contained complete data (Valid N, listwise = 250), therefore no imputation procedures were required.

5. RESULTS

5.1. ATTACHMENT STYLE DISTRIBUTION (RSQ) AND ASSOCIATION WITH FAMILY TYPE

Table 1 summarizes the distribution of attachment styles (RSQ) in the sample and their composition by gender, residence, and family type. Because the alternative-care group was small ($n = 22$), percentages for this subgroup should be interpreted cautiously.

Table 1

Distribution of attachment styles (RSQ) by gender, residence, and family type (%)

RSQ	%	Boys	Girls	Urban	Rural	Two parent	Single parent	Inst./AMP
Secure	39.6	56	44	46	54	77	17	6
Preoccupied	22.4	46	54	46	54	61	28	11
Dismissive	25.2	58	42	38	62	52	34	14
Fearful	12.8	50	50	42	58	52	45	3

Note. Inst./AMP = institutional care and/or professional foster care (asistent maternal profesionist).

A χ^2 test indicated that attachment style distribution differed across family types, $\chi^2(6) = 17.34$, $p = 0.008$, Cramer's $V = 0.19$, 95% CI [0.05, 0.25]. The two-parent group contained a higher proportion of secure and preoccupied styles, whereas dismissing attachment was relatively more frequent in the alternative-care group; given the small size of the alternative-care subsample, these patterns should be interpreted as descriptive rather than definitive.

5.2. FAMILY TYPE AND RELATIONAL ORGANIZATION (IPPA)

Table 2 reports descriptive statistics and Kruskal–Wallis tests comparing family type groups on attachment-related relationship quality toward mother, father, and peers (IPPA). To control for multiple testing within this family of comparisons, Benjamini–Hochberg FDR-adjusted q-values are also reported.

Table 2

Family type differences in attachment to mother, father, and peers (IPPA)

IPPA dimension	Two-parent M (SD)	Single-parent M (SD)	Inst./AMP M (SD)	H	p	ϵ^2	q (FDR)
Mother attachment – Trust	42.01 (6.75)	36.46 (11.60)	33.23 (9.80)	24.401	< .001	0.091	0.004
Mother attachment – Communication	33.28 (7.09)	28.40 (10.13)	25.91 (8.69)	20.21	< .001	0.074	0.004
Mother attachment – Alienation	12.68 (5.39)	14.28 (6.29)	14.23 (5.90)	3.735	0.155	0.007	0.232
Mother attachment – Total	99.56 (16.99)	88.00 (25.12)	87.95 (21.57)	12.737	0.002	0.043	0.005
Father attachment – Trust	40.08 (7.92)	34.31 (12.53)	32.91 (11.78)	14.347	< .001	0.05	0.004
Father attachment – Communication	30.64 (8.18)	26.44 (10.19)	25.32 (8.83)	12.793	0.002	0.044	0.005
Father attachment – Alienation	13.95 (5.63)	15.22 (6.83)	15.91 (6.65)	2.298	0.317	0.001	0.38

Table 2 (continued)

IPPA dimension	Two-parent M (SD)	Single-parent M (SD)	Inst./AMP M (SD)	H	p	ϵ^2	q (FDR)
Father attachment – Total	94.14 (18.49)	83.21 (28.61)	85.64 (24.85)	6.533	0.038	0.018	0.076
Peer attachment – Trust	41.39 (7.55)	39.65 (8.80)	38.50 (11.36)	1.739	0.419	0	0.419
Peer attachment – Communication	42.10 (7.66)	41.07 (8.42)	39.59 (10.34)	1.032	0.597	0	0.597
Peer attachment – Alienation	14.28 (4.48)	16.81 (13.48)	14.41 (6.16)	4.268	0.118	0.009	0.202
Peer attachment – Total	94.88 (14.33)	91.53 (17.16)	88.50 (17.95)	3.033	0.219	0.004	0.292

Note. Kruskal–Wallis tests ($df = 2$) compared three family type groups (two-parent, single-parent, institutional/AMP). ϵ^2 = epsilon-squared effect size for Kruskal–Wallis. q-values are Benjamini–Hochberg FDR-adjusted within the set of 12 IPPA tests. Inst./AMP group size was small ($n = 22$), therefore estimates involving this group may be less stable.

Consistent with H1, family type was associated with multiple indicators of parental attachment quality. Adolescents from two-parent families reported higher trust and communication toward mother and father than adolescents from single-parent families and, most markedly, those in alternative care. These differences were robust after FDR correction for maternal trust and communication, paternal trust and communication, and maternal total attachment (all $q \leq 0.005$). In contrast, attachment to peers (trust, communication, alienation, and total) did not differ by family type (all $ps \geq 0.118$), suggesting that peer attachment may be less structurally constrained in late adolescence within this sample.

5.3. FAMILY TYPE AND SOCIO-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCES (INEM)

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics and Kruskal–Wallis tests for emotional intelligence (INEM) outcomes by family type. Across global and component scores, differences by family type were small and nonsignificant.

Table 3

Family type differences in emotional intelligence outcomes (INEM)

Outcome (INEM)	Two-parent M (SD)	Single-parent M (SD)	Inst./AMP M (SD)	H	p	ϵ^2
Global trait EI (INEM)	2.33 (1.18)	2.07 (1.05)	2.36 (1.14)	2.341	0.31	0.001
Intrapersonal competence	2.27 (1.18)	2.12 (1.11)	2.23 (1.19)	0.724	0.696	0
Understanding own emotions	1.70 (0.60)	1.63 (0.61)	1.64 (0.49)	0.205	0.903	0
Regulating own emotions	1.72 (0.63)	1.65 (0.58)	1.59 (0.59)	1.193	0.551	0
Interpersonal competence	2.39 (1.14)	2.09 (1.02)	2.50 (1.11)	3.304	0.192	0.004

Table 3 (continued)

Outcome (INEM)	Two-parent M (SD)	Single-parent M (SD)	Inst./AMP M (SD)	H	p	ε^2
Regulating others' emotions	1.55 (0.63)	1.43 (0.59)	1.59 (0.61)	3.119	0.21	0.004
Recognizing others' emotions	1.56 (0.66)	1.46 (0.63)	1.41 (0.50)	1.585	0.453	0
Social desirability	1.56 (0.68)	1.34 (0.54)	1.55 (0.74)	5.191	0.075	0.013

Note. Kruskal–Wallis tests ($df = 2$) compared family type groups on INEM outcomes. Scores represent level-based indices used in the dataset. ε^2 = epsilon-squared effect size.

Contrary to H2, family type was not associated with global trait emotional intelligence or with the examined INEM components (all $ps \geq 0.075$; $\varepsilon^2 \leq 0.013$). A trend-level difference emerged for the social desirability indicator ($p = 0.075$), suggesting possible differences in response style across groups; however, this did not reach conventional significance.

5.4. EMOTIONAL MATURITY (FRIEDMANN) BY FAMILY TYPE

Table 4 summarizes emotional maturity scores by family type. A small but statistically significant difference was observed across groups.

Table 4

Emotional maturity (Friedmann) by family type

Family type	M (SD)	H	p	ε^2
Two-parent	2.52 (0.78)	8.387	0.015	0.026
Single-parent	2.24 (0.73)			
Inst./AMP	2.27 (0.55)			

Note. Friedmann scores represent level-based indices in the dataset. Kruskal–Wallis test ($df = 2$) compares family types. ε^2 = epsilon-squared effect size.

Adolescents from two-parent families showed slightly higher emotional maturity scores than those from single-parent families and alternative care (Table 4). Given the cross-sectional design and the small alternative-care subsample, this finding should be interpreted as an association rather than an effect of family structure.

5.5. ATTACHMENT STYLE AND SELF-ESTEEM (ASSI)

Table 5 presents the distribution of self-esteem levels across attachment styles. Differences were evaluated with a χ^2 test of independence.

Table 5

Self-esteem (ASSI) by attachment style RSQ (percentages)

RSQ	N	Low	Medium	High	Self-devaluation	Infatuation
Secure	100	21.0%	48.0%	31.0%	13.0%	21.0%
Preoccupied	57	31.6%	45.6%	22.8%	24.6%	19.3%
Dismissive	64	29.7%	35.9%	34.4%	26.6%	25.0%
Fearful	29	51.7%	27.6%	20.7%	41.4%	17.2%

Secure attachment was associated with a higher proportion of medium-to-high self-esteem, whereas fearful attachment showed the highest proportion of low self-esteem (Table 5). Associations between attachment style and the ASSI self-devaluation and infatuation levels were not statistically significant in this sample (self-devaluation: $\chi^2(6) = 7.95$, $p = 0.242$; infatuation: $\chi^2(6) = 3.06$, $p = 0.801$).

5.6. PEER ATTACHMENT AS A PREDICTOR OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE (MULTIPLE REGRESSION)

To test the compensatory role of peer attachment proposed in the family architecture framework, we estimated multiple regression models predicting (a) global emotional intelligence and (b) understanding others' emotions, from attachment to mother, father, and peers (IPPA total scores). Table 6 reports model summaries, coefficients, and 95% CIs.

Model: Global emotional intelligence (IE_{global}) – $R^2 = 0.067$; Adj. $R^2 = 0.056$; $F(3,246) = 5.93$; $p = 0.001$

Table 6

Multiple regression models predicting emotional intelligence outcomes from parental and peer attachment (IPPA total scores)

Predictor (IPPA total)	B	SE B	β	t	p	95% CI for B	VIF
Attachment to mother	0.015	0.008	0.121	1.796	0.074	[-0.001, 0.031]	1.256
Attachment to father	0.008	0.008	0.026	0.399	0.69	[-0.008, 0.024]	1.256
Attachment to peers	0.026	0.01	0.162	2.527	0.012	[0.006, 0.046]	1.256

Peer attachment (IPPA peers total) was the only significant predictor after controlling for attachment to mother and father, supporting H4. Effect sizes were small ($R^2 \approx 0.07$), consistent with the expectation that socio-emotional competences in adolescence are shaped by multiple determinants beyond attachment alone.

6. DISCUSSION

This study set out to operationalize and test the family architecture framework in a Romanian adolescent sample by linking family type to relational organization (attachment) and to socio-emotional competences. Consistent with H1, family type was associated with key parental attachment dimensions: adolescents from two-parent families reported higher trust and communication with both mother and father, and higher total attachment to mother, than peers from single-parent families and alternative-care settings. These findings converge with process-oriented accounts suggesting that structural transitions and caregiving disruptions may be expressed in adolescents' perceived availability and emotional accessibility of caregivers, particularly through trust and communication channels (van Dijk *et al.*, 2020).

Contrary to H2, family type was not associated with global trait emotional intelligence or its components as assessed via self-report (INEM). One interpretation, aligned with the family architecture model, is that peer relationships in late adolescence may attenuate structural differences by providing alternative sources of emotional learning and support. This interpretation is consistent with evidence that peer attachment and peer functioning become increasingly salient for adolescent well-being and may partly compensate for lower perceived parental support (Delgado *et al.*, 2022). At the same time, emotional maturity (Friedmann) showed a small group difference, suggesting that some aspects of socio-emotional development may remain sensitive to caregiving context even when perceived emotional intelligence does not differ.

H3 received partial support: attachment style was associated with global self-esteem, with secure attachment linked to more favorable self-evaluations, whereas fearful attachment showed the highest prevalence of low self-esteem. This pattern is broadly consistent with attachment-based models in which internal working models organize self-worth and relational expectations. Notably, attachment style was not significantly associated with self-devaluation or infatuation levels in this dataset, indicating that attachment-related differences may be more pronounced for global self-esteem than for specific self-evaluative tendencies captured by ASSI.

Support for H4 was clear: peer attachment uniquely predicted both global trait emotional intelligence and understanding others' emotions beyond parental attachment. Although effect sizes were small, the pattern is theoretically meaningful in adolescence, when daily emotion work increasingly occurs in the peer context. This finding also illustrates a key claim of family architecture: structural family type relates strongly to parental relationship quality, whereas socio-emotional competences may be partly scaffolded by non-familial attachments when peers provide trust and emotional communication opportunities.

Interpretation and methodological considerations. The present evidence should be interpreted within several methodological constraints. First, the cross-sectional

design precludes causal inference. Associations between family type, attachment, and socio-emotional outcomes may reflect selection effects and unmeasured confounders such as socioeconomic status, cumulative adversity, or placement history. Second, the alternative-care group was small ($n = 22$) and likely heterogeneous (institutional and foster contexts), reducing statistical power and stability of subgroup estimates. Third, all constructs were assessed via self-report, increasing the risk of common method variance and socially desirable responding; the trend-level family-type differences in social desirability underscore this possibility. Fourth, psychometric properties in the current sample were not comprehensively documented, which limits assessment of measurement reliability and validity.

A further interpretive point concerns the measurement of emotional competence. The INEM assesses trait emotional intelligence via self-report, which captures perceived emotional competences and emotion-related self-concepts rather than ability-based performance. Systematic reviews have emphasized that ability-based and trait-based measures can yield different patterns and may not be interchangeable (Bru-Luna *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, the absence of family-type differences in INEM outcomes should not be interpreted as evidence that actual emotion-processing abilities are unaffected by caregiving context; rather, it suggests that adolescents' self-perceived emotional competences are not strongly differentiated by family type in this sample.

Despite these limitations, the results have practical implications when framed cautiously as directions for intervention and future research. Relationship-focused programs that strengthen caregiver–adolescent trust and communication (in intact families, single-parent families, and alternative-care contexts) may support adolescents' socio-emotional development. In educational settings, socio-emotional learning and counseling programs could incorporate structured peer mentoring and group-based emotional skills training, leveraging the observed predictive role of peer attachment. For child protection services, interventions that stabilize caregiving relationships and enhance emotionally attuned communication may be particularly relevant. Future research should use longitudinal, multi-informant designs (adolescents, caregivers, teachers) and include ability-based measures of emotional competence, as well as key contextual covariates, to test mediation pathways proposed by the family architecture model.

In future operationalizations of family architecture, it will be important to directly assess autonomy-supportive parenting and related controlling practices. Theory and recent reviews suggest that autonomy support is beneficial for adolescent adjustment (Benito-Gomez *et al.*, 2020), whereas psychologically controlling parenting is linked to less adaptive emotion regulation (Beliveau *et al.*, 2023). Incorporating such constructs would allow stronger tests of the proposed process pathways from family architecture to socio-emotional competences.

Moreover, adolescents with histories of institutional care or multiple placements may have experienced early adversity and caregiving instability, which

can influence attachment and socio-emotional development (Zeanah *et al.*, 2005). Because placement history variables were not available in the current analyses, these contextual influences could not be disentangled.

In addition, the psychometric properties of the instruments in the current sample (*e.g.*, internal consistency, construct validity, and cultural adaptation details) were not fully reported, which limits the evaluation of measurement quality and should be addressed in future replications and manuscript versions.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Family architecture offers a process-oriented lens for integrating family structural configuration with relational organization and adolescent socio-emotional development. In this Romanian sample, family type was associated with parental attachment quality (trust and communication), while perceived emotional intelligence was not structurally differentiated; instead, peer attachment emerged as a consistent predictor of emotional intelligence outcomes. Attachment style was linked to global self-esteem, reinforcing the relevance of internal working models for adolescent self-evaluation. Overall, the findings support the conceptual value of family architecture while underscoring the need for cautious interpretation and for more rigorous longitudinal and multi-method research to establish mechanisms and causal pathways.

8. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The study is cross-sectional, which limits causal inference. Future research should integrate indicators of family climate (communication, cohesion, conflict), longitudinal designs, and multi-level analyses (family-school-community) to refine the family architecture model.

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