

DOES CHILDHOOD FATHER INVOLVEMENT FOSTER TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP? EVIDENCE FROM MEDIATION MODEL ATTACHMENT

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Abstract

Transformational leadership is increasingly recognized as a critical competency in contemporary organizations, yet its developmental antecedents remain insufficiently understood. Although father involvement has been linked to positive psychosocial outcomes, the psychological mechanism through which early paternal caregiving contributes to transformational leadership has received limited empirical attention. This study examined the role of attachment in the association between father involvement and transformational leadership among emerging and young adults. A quantitative explanatory correlational design was employed with 310 participants aged 20–40 years who had prior leadership experience. Data were collected using the Father Involvement Scale (FIS), Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R), and Transformational Leadership Inventory (TLI) and analyzed using mediation analysis with a bootstrapping approach. The findings revealed that father involvement was directly associated with transformational leadership, while attachment was also associated with transformational leadership. However, attachment did not mediate the association between father involvement and transformational leadership. These findings suggest that the developmental influence of father involvement on transformational leadership may operate through alternative pathways beyond attachment, such as self-regulation, socio-emotional competence, resilience, and social learning. This study contributes to developmental and organizational psychology by providing a more comprehensive understanding of how early paternal caregiving experiences shape transformational leadership in adulthood.

Keywords: father involvement; attachment; transformational leadership; leadership development; emerging adulthood.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the rapid advancement of information technology and the increasing complexity of social dynamics have positioned mental health as a prominent issue in contemporary society. Accelerated exposure to information, heightened productivity demands, and shifting patterns of social interaction have created novel psychosocial pressures, particularly among early adults. This phenomenon is reflected in the Deloitte (2023) report, which indicated that 46% of Generation Z and 39% of Millennials experience prolonged stress, with more than half reporting symptoms of burnout. Similarly, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) documented a global increase of approximately 25% in anxiety and depression disorders following the COVID-19 pandemic. In Indonesia, the Ministry of Health reported that 6.1% of young individuals experience mental disorders, with work-related stress identified as one of the contributing factors to psychological vulnerability (Kementerian Kesehatan Indonesia, 2023).

These psychological challenges may partly be understood as normative consequences of early adulthood, a developmental period characterized by multiple life transitions, including career establishment, interpersonal relationship development, and the pursuit of financial and social independence (Butterbaugh et al., 2020; Hamzah et al., 2024). However, contemporary evidence suggests that psychological vulnerability among young adults is influenced not only by developmental demands but also by changing expectations regarding careers and workplace experiences (Chala et al., 2022; Thomas et al., 2025). As awareness of mental health continues to increase, the workplace is no longer perceived solely as a source of financial security but also as an environment expected to fulfill psychological needs by providing social support, facilitating value congruence, and enabling self-actualization (Schoofs et al., 2022; Siddiqui et al., 2023).

This shift has important implications for organizations, particularly in maintaining employee engagement and organizational commitment. According to PwC (2024), approximately 63% of young employees consider leaving their organizations when personal values are inconsistent with organizational values. Likewise, Gallup (2023) reported that only 21% of employees worldwide are engaged in their work, with engagement levels being particularly low among young managers under the age of 35 (Kleina-Šnipke & Krēsliņš, 2025). Low engagement not only reduces organizational performance but also contributes to emerging workplace phenomena such as quiet quitting, which has increasingly been recognized as a reflection of challenges in contemporary organizational culture (Gabelaia & Bagociunaite, 2023; Pevec, 2023). These findings highlight the importance of cultivating leaders who are capable of fostering supportive interpersonal relationships and creating meaningful work environments that promote employee well-being and engagement.

Leadership has consequently become a central factor in addressing these organizational challenges. Previous studies consistently demonstrate that leadership style is associated with employee job satisfaction, engagement, psychological well-being, and turnover intentions (Abolnasser et al., 2023; Asianab, 2023; Kim, 2022; Yang, 2025). Among various leadership approaches, transformational leadership has received considerable attention because it enables leaders to inspire followers, facilitate personal development, and cultivate meaningful relationships within organizations (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Celestin & Sujatha, 2024; Jeong & Jeong, 2025). Although the effectiveness of transformational leadership has been extensively documented, considerably less attention has been devoted to understanding the developmental experiences that contribute to the emergence of transformational leadership capacities during adulthood.

Developmental psychology suggests that interpersonal competencies, emotional regulation, and relational capacities are shaped long before individuals enter organizational settings. Early caregiving experiences, particularly those involving parents, provide the foundation for socioemotional development that may subsequently influence interpersonal functioning in adulthood (Held et al., 2023). Among these experiences, father involvement has received increasing attention because active paternal engagement contributes positively to children's emotional, cognitive, and social development (Song & Wang, 2025; Webster et al., 2013; Puglisi et al., 2024). This issue is particularly relevant in Indonesia, where father involvement remains constrained by traditional gender norms that primarily position fathers as economic providers while assigning caregiving responsibilities to mothers (Maharani, 2025; Novianti et al., 2023). Consequently, many children experience limited paternal engagement despite fathers' physical presence within the family.

Although previous studies have demonstrated the importance of father involvement for various psychosocial outcomes, including psychological well-being, emotional regulation, and interpersonal relationship quality (Diniz et al., 2021; Mota et al., 2026; Xu et al., 2025), its contribution to leadership development remains relatively underexplored. Likewise, studies on transformational leadership have predominantly focused on organizational antecedents and workplace consequences rather than developmental experiences that shape leadership characteristics (Badura et al., 2022; Day et al., 2014). While theoretical perspectives suggest that attachment may explain how early caregiving experiences influence interpersonal functioning throughout adulthood, empirical studies integrating childhood father involvement, attachment, and transformational leadership within a single explanatory framework remain limited, particularly in non-Western cultural settings such as Indonesia (McClean et al., 2021).

Addressing this gap, the present study integrates developmental psychology and leadership literature by examining the relationship between childhood father involvement and transformational leadership through the mediating role of attachment. By positioning attachment as a psychological mechanism linking early caregiving experiences with adult leadership behavior, this study extends previous research that has largely examined these constructs independently. This integrative perspective is expected to enrich the understanding of transformational leadership by incorporating developmental antecedents that have received relatively limited empirical attention.

Based on this theoretical, the present study aims to examine the influence of childhood father involvement on transformational leadership among early adults, with attachment serving as a mediating variable. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically by extending leadership literature through the integration of developmental perspectives while providing practical implications for leadership development programs that consider individuals' early relational experiences. Accordingly, the proposed hypotheses are as follows: (H1) childhood father involvement has a significant effect on transformational leadership; (H2) childhood father involvement has a significant effect on attachment; (H3) attachment has a significant effect on transformational leadership; and (H4) attachment mediates the relationship between childhood father involvement and transformational leadership.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach using an explanatory correlational research design to examine the hypothesized relationships among the study variables through a mediation model. Specifically, the study investigated the effect of childhood father involvement on transformational leadership, with attachment serving as the mediating variable among emerging adults. The proposed conceptual model posits that fathers' involvement in parenting contributes to the development of interpersonal relationship quality, as reflected in attachment, which subsequently influences the development of transformational leadership characteristics during emerging adulthood. Accordingly, the study model comprised one independent variable (childhood father involvement), one mediating variable (attachment), and one dependent variable (transformational leadership). The hypothesized mediation model was tested using path analysis based on the PROCESS framework with a bootstrapping approach to estimate both the direct and indirect effects among the study variables.

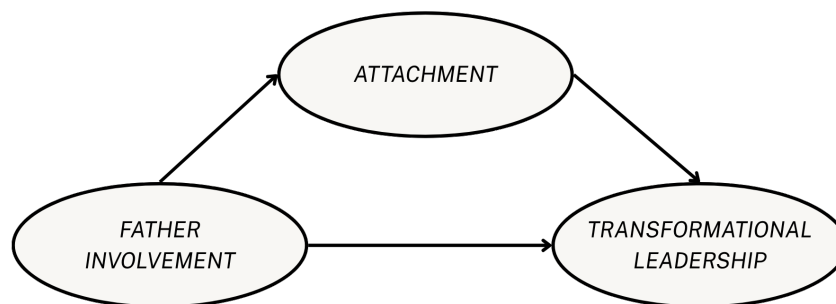


Image: Proposed Path Model

The target population consisted of emerging adults aged 20–40 years, consistent with the developmental classification proposed by Santrock (2019) and Hokken-Koelega et al. (2023), who had leadership experience. Participants were eligible if they (a) were between 20 and 40 years old, (b) had held or were currently holding a leadership position for at least one year in formal organizations (e.g., private companies, government institutions, or non-profit organizations) or semi-formal organizations (e.g., community or student organizations), and (c) had a biological father or father figure who was present during their developmental years. A total of 310 participants were recruited using purposive sampling, exceeding the minimum sample size recommended for mediation analysis and ensuring adequate statistical power (Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007; Hayes, 2017; Sim et al., 2022). Data were collected using an online self-report questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of an informed consent form, demographic questions, and three standardized instruments: the Father Involvement Scale (FIS), the Experiences in Close Relationships–Revised (ECR-R), and the Transformational Leadership Inventory (TLI). The survey link was distributed through social media as well as academic, professional, and community networks. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and only respondents who provided informed consent were allowed to complete the survey. Responses were screened for completeness and eligibility before being included in the final analyses.

Father involvement was measured using the Father Involvement Scale (FIS) developed by Finley and Schwartz (2004) and adapted into Indonesian by Ajrina (2012), which assesses perceived paternal involvement across affective, cognitive, and behavioral domains using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never involved) to 5 (always involved). Attachment was assessed using the Experiences in Close Relationships–Revised (ECR-R) developed by Fraley et al. (2000) and adapted into Indonesian by Steven (2017), which measures attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Transformational leadership was measured using the Transformational Leadership Inventory (TLI) developed by Podsakoff et al. (1990, as cited in Northouse, 2016). As no validated Indonesian version was available, the instrument was translated and culturally adapted through expert review involving six experts in psychology and English language studies. The TLI measures four dimensions of transformational leadership—idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). All instruments demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .954 for the FIS, .887 for the ECR-R, and .840 for the TLI.

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Data were analyzed using mediation analysis in JASP based on the PROCESS framework with percentile bootstrap confidence intervals to estimate both direct and indirect effects. Bootstrapping was employed because it provides robust estimates of mediation effects without assuming normally distributed sampling distributions (Hayes, 2017). Statistical significance was determined using a two-tailed p value of $< .05$ and 95% bootstrap confidence intervals, with indirect effects considered significant when the confidence interval did not include zero.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 310 participants met the study's inclusion criteria and were included in the analyses. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Demography

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	20 years	25	8,06
	21–25 years	259	83,55
	26–30 years	14	4,52
	> 30 years	12	3,87
Leadership experience	1 years	137	44,19
	2–3 years	134	43,23
	4–5 years	27	8,71
	6–10 years or more	12	3,87
Paternal closeness	Very distant	4	1,29
	Not close	52	16,77
	Close	163	52,58
	Very close	91	29,35
Total		310	100

Hypothesis testing was subsequently conducted using PROCESS-based mediation analysis with a bootstrap confidence interval approach. The results are presented below.

Table 2. Direct Effects Among Variables

		Estimate	Std. Error	z-value	p
Father involvement	→ Attachment	-0.082	0.108	-0.759	.448
Father involvement	→ Transformational leadership	0.045	0.020	2.204	.028
Attachment	→ Transformational leadership	-0.024	0.011	-2.222	.026

Note. Moderation effect estimates are based on mean-centered variables.

The path analysis results indicated that not all hypothesized relationships received empirical support. Specifically, the relationship between father involvement and attachment was found to be non-significant, suggesting that participants' perceived level of paternal involvement was not directly associated with variations in attachment during early adulthood. This finding suggests that attachment formation may be influenced by other factors not included in the present research model.

In contrast, attachment showed a significant effect on transformational leadership. The negative direction of the relationship can be explained by the use of the ECR-R, which measures individuals' levels of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. Thus, higher levels of attachment insecurity were associated with lower levels of transformational leadership behavior. This finding indicates that relational capacity and emotion regulation, as reflected in attachment patterns, play an important role in supporting the emergence of transformational leadership

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characteristics. Furthermore, father involvement also demonstrated a significant direct effect on transformational leadership. This result indicates that greater paternal involvement during the parenting process is associated with a greater tendency to display transformational leadership behaviors in early adulthood.

Table 3. Indirect Effects

Table 3: Indirect Effects					Estimate	Std. Error	z-value	p
Father involvement	→	Transformational leadership			0.045	0.020	2.204	.028
Father involvement	→	Attachment	→	Transformational leadership	0.002	0.003	0.498	.473

Note. Moderation effect estimates are based on mean-centered variables.

Subsequent mediation testing showed that attachment did not mediate the relationship between father involvement and transformational leadership. In other words, the effect of paternal involvement on transformational leadership did not operate through attachment as assumed in the proposed research model. These findings suggest that although attachment is related to transformational leadership, it does not explain the pathway through which paternal involvement contributes to the development of transformational leadership behavior.

Table 4. Total effects

				Estimate	Std. Error	z-value	p
Total	Father involvement	→	Transformational leadership	0.047	0.020	2.284	.022
Total indirect	Father involvement	→	Transformational leadership	0.002	0.003	0.718	.473

Note. Moderation effect estimates are based on mean-centered variables.

Although the mediating effect was not supported, the analysis showed that father involvement still had a significant total effect on transformational leadership. This finding indicates that paternal involvement is a factor that contributes to the development of transformational leadership characteristics in early adulthood, as initially hypothesized. Given the absence of a significant mediating effect, the influence of father involvement appears to operate more strongly through a direct pathway rather than through the psychological mechanism represented by attachment in the present research model.

In psychology, personality is understood as a psychological system reflected in relatively consistent patterns of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, while remaining capable of developing throughout an individual's lifespan (Baker, 2022). A growing body of research suggests that personality characteristics are not static; rather, they are shaped through the interaction of individual dispositions, social experiences, and developmental processes that unfold over time (Martin et al., 2022; Popov & Thielmann, 2024). These changes may be influenced by a wide range of life experiences, including both major life events and recurring everyday experiences, indicating that personality is more appropriately understood as the outcome of a dynamic and continuous developmental process (Dugan et al., 2023).

One manifestation of this developmental process can be observed in leadership behavior. Leadership not only reflects technical competence or organizational experience but also represents a psychological capacity that develops through individual learning processes. In this role, individuals are generally expected to build trust, communicate a compelling vision, manage conflicts, and maintain the quality of interpersonal relationships within groups (Gómez-Leal et al., 2021; Muss, 2025). Furthermore, the effectiveness of leadership behavior depends on leaders' ability to understand followers' needs through empathy and social awareness, as well as emotional

intelligence that supports self-regulation in complex and demanding situations (Van Kleef & Côté, 2021; Tenschert et al., 2024; Jayadi & Ady, 2025; Dahir, 2025). Therefore, leadership capacity does not emerge instantaneously upon assuming a formal organizational position; rather, it is the result of accumulated developmental and learning experiences that begin in childhood and continue into adulthood through identity formation, relational experiences, and participation in diverse social roles (Walker et al., 2024; Riera et al., 2024).

The Role of Fathers in Character Development and Leadership Capacity

Held et al. (2023) previously argued that leadership can already be identified during early childhood. This potential can be assessed by examining the development of five major domains in childhood: self-management, innovation, social engagement, cooperation, and emotional resilience (Napolitano et al., 2021). These developmental domains provide a theoretical basis for understanding how parenting experiences, particularly father involvement, may shape the psychological capacities that give rise to transformational leadership behaviors.

The findings of the present study indicate that father involvement significantly influences the development of transformational leadership characteristics, although this relationship is not mediated by attachment. This suggests that fathers' influence on leadership capacity may not depend on a single psychological mechanism but rather involve multiple, more complex developmental processes. In other words, although attachment represents an important consequence of father involvement, the influence of paternal parenting on the development of leadership characteristics may operate more strongly through other developmental pathways established within the family context (Duan et al., 2022; Held et al., 2023). This interpretation is consistent with findings from previous research demonstrating that paternal caregiving experiences influence leadership development through multiple mechanisms, including the enhancement of psychological competencies, socio-emotional competencies, and the development of interpersonal relationship patterns and autonomy that persist into adulthood (Zheng et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021).

These mechanisms are likely to develop when fathers contribute not only through their physical presence but also by providing emotional support, guidance, supervision, responsibility for their children's needs, and meaningful opportunities for autonomy (Osborne & Ahinkorah, 2024; Jeong et al., 2024). Such characteristics closely resemble the demands placed on effective leaders, who are expected to guide, support, motivate, provide feedback, and facilitate the development of others (Popper, 2000; Stellner, 2022). This relationship can also be explained theoretically by considering the distinctive characteristics of paternal parenting compared with those of other caregivers (Liu et al., 2021). Relative to other caregivers, fathers are more likely to provide experiences that encourage exploration, adaptive risk-taking, the development of independence, and the confidence to face novel situations (Feldman, 2023; Liu et al., 2021).

Through play activities, collaborative problem-solving, and everyday interactions, children are provided with opportunities to develop problem-solving skills, self-regulation, attentional control, social competence, and the ability to adapt to challenges (Ulfah, 2025). Over time, these experiences contribute to the development of stronger self-efficacy, higher self-esteem, greater emotional stability, and increased resilience (Osborne & Ahinkorah, 2024). Even during adolescence, perceptions of father involvement remain positively associated with emotional intelligence and more adaptive social adjustment, suggesting that the influence of paternal parenting extends throughout the developmental lifespan.

One theoretical framework that helps explain these developmental mechanisms is Social Cognitive Theory. Bandura proposed that individuals acquire social behaviors by observing significant role models, whose behaviors are subsequently internalized as guides for conduct across various life contexts (Bandura, 1969; Firmansyah & Saepuloh, 2022; Trismayanti et al., 2026). In their domestic role, fathers naturally function as leaders of the household and consequently become primary social models through whom children learn to manage conflict and fulfill social responsibilities (Engle & Breaux, 1998; Wood & Brownhill, 2018; Randles, 2020). In practical terms, when fathers make family decisions, what factors they consider, how they evaluate different situations, and how they communicate their decisions, children observe these processes and gradually learn how they themselves should think and behave when they eventually encounter similar situations.

Furthermore, the various capacities fostered through father involvement can be linked to the core dimensions of transformational leadership. Consistent experiences of receiving attention, support, and guidance cultivate the ability to understand the needs of others, thereby laying the foundation for individualized consideration (Diniz et al., 2021). This capacity subsequently supports the development of idealized influence, as leaders who demonstrate genuine personal concern are more likely to earn followers' trust and serve as role models (Khan et al., 2022). Likewise, fathers' experiences in providing direction, fostering family commitment, and motivating children to pursue shared goals reflect characteristics associated with inspirational motivation (Sutanto et al., 2021; Yulianti et

al., 2019). Finally, fathers' tendency to encourage exploration and problem-solving from an early age contributes to the development of intellectual stimulation, another defining dimension of transformational leadership (Feldman, 2023; Gahwaji et al., 2025).

The Unrelated of Father Involvement and Attachment

Regarding the non-significant mediating role of attachment, several considerations are necessary to better understand the nature of the relationship between father involvement and attachment. The literature suggests that father involvement does not automatically result in greater attachment security. Contrary to the linear assumption that higher levels of father involvement inevitably lead to more secure attachment, several studies have found that the quantity of paternal involvement is often a less sensitive predictor than the quality of father–child interactions (Brown et al., 2012; Madigan et al., 2024). This conclusion is further supported by meta-analytic evidence demonstrating that paternal sensitivity is a more consistent predictor of attachment security than father involvement measured solely in terms of quantity (Lucassen et al., 2011; Madigan et al., 2024).

These findings provide an important perspective for interpreting the results of the present study. Measures of father involvement generally assess the extent to which fathers participate in various caregiving activities, such as communication, supervision, emotional support, and involvement in their children's daily lives. Attachment, however, primarily reflects the quality of the emotional bond that develops through interactions characterized by consistency, sensitivity, and responsiveness. Consequently, even when fathers demonstrate high levels of involvement, such involvement may not necessarily produce meaningful variation in attachment quality. Brown et al. (2012) further demonstrated that the relationship between father involvement and attachment depends on the degree of paternal sensitivity accompanying that involvement, suggesting that the association between the two constructs is not necessarily direct. This finding may also be explained by considering other factors that contribute to attachment formation. These include the quality of the parental relationship, co-parenting practices, maternal support, parental mental health, and the overall level of family stress (Knappe et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2024; Diniz et al., 2021). Given the wide range of factors involved in the development of attachment, it is plausible that the relationship between father involvement and attachment in the present study was attenuated or insufficiently strong to produce a significant mediating effect.

From a methodological perspective, the non-significant findings may also reflect the way these constructs were measured. Previous studies have shown that different forms of father involvement, such as play activities, direct caregiving, and emotional support, may produce distinct developmental outcomes (Brown et al., 2018). When these diverse forms of involvement are combined into a single composite score, meaningful differences in their developmental effects may become obscured. Likewise, several scholars have argued that many attachment instruments were originally developed based on mother–child relationships and therefore may not fully capture the unique characteristics of father–child attachment, potentially leading to an underestimation of fathers' contributions to child development (Dumont & Paquette, 2013; Deneault et al., 2021).

Taken together, the non-significant attachment mediation observed in the present study should not be interpreted as evidence that father–child attachment is unimportant for individual development. Rather, the findings suggest that the relationship between father involvement and attachment is likely more complex than assumed in the proposed research model. In other words, the results indicate that the influence of father involvement on transformational leadership may not operate primarily through the attachment mechanism measured in this study, but instead through alternative developmental pathways or aspects of the father–child relationship that were not fully captured by the model. This interpretation is consistent with the view that null findings often reflect the limitations of a research model in capturing the complexity of developmental processes rather than the absence of meaningful relationships among the variables under investigation.

CONCLUSION

The present study was designed to examine how father involvement influences the development of transformational leadership, with attachment proposed as a mediating mechanism. The findings revealed that father involvement had a significant direct effect on transformational leadership, while attachment was also found to be a significant predictor of transformational leadership. However, attachment did not mediate the relationship between father involvement and transformational leadership because father involvement was not significantly associated with attachment. These findings suggest that the influence of father involvement on the development of transformational leadership characteristics is not primarily transmitted through attachment, but is more likely to operate through alternative developmental pathways, such as the development of self-regulation, socio-emotional competence, self-

efficacy, resilience, problem-solving skills, and the internalization of leadership behaviors through social learning processes. At the same time, attachment remains an important developmental factor that supports transformational leadership by fostering secure internal working models, emotional regulation, interpersonal trust, and the capacity to establish supportive relationships with followers.

Overall, this study contributes to the fields of developmental psychology and industrial and organizational psychology by demonstrating that the relationship between paternal caregiving experiences and the development of transformational leadership is multidimensional. These findings extend current understanding by showing that attachment is not the sole developmental mechanism through which father involvement shapes leadership capacity. Future research should therefore investigate alternative mediating mechanisms that more comprehensively capture the complexity of the developmental processes linking paternal caregiving experiences to leadership capacity in emerging adulthood.

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