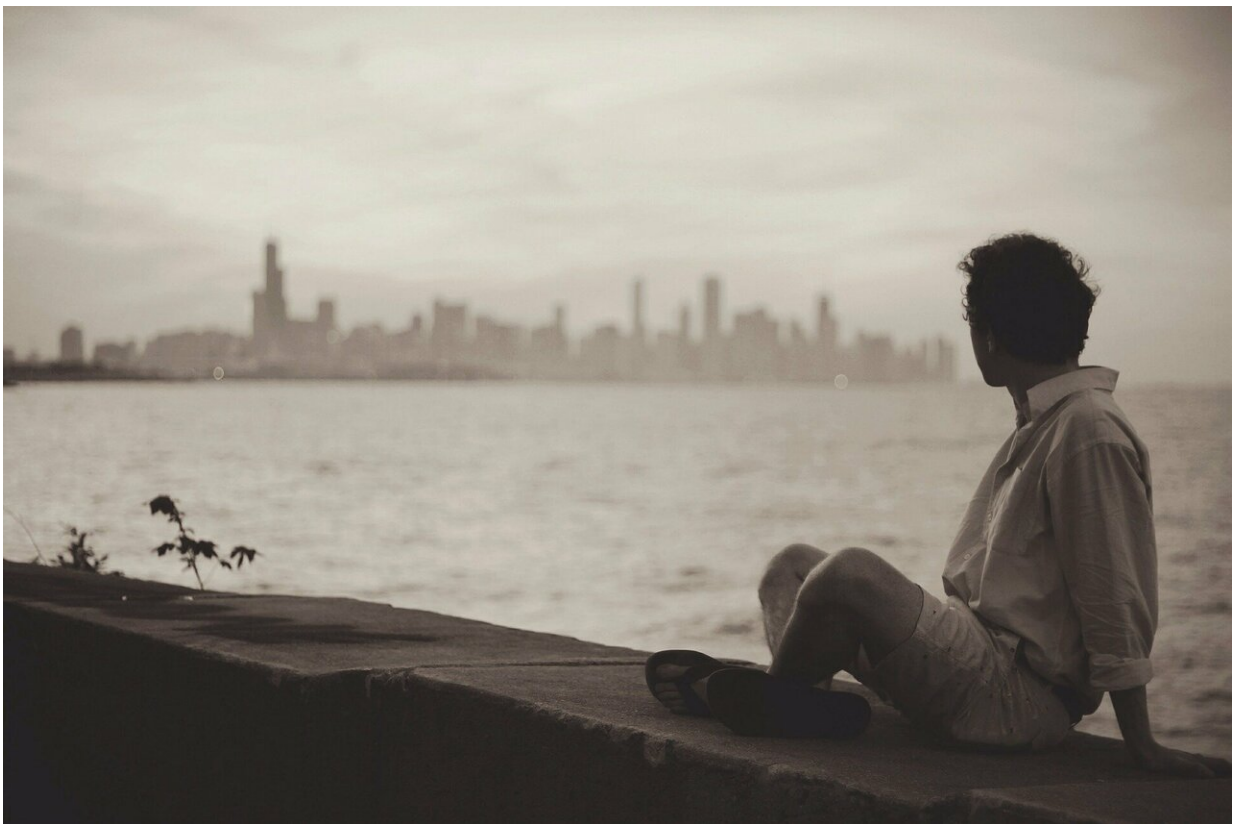


# Would you be happy as a long-term single? The answer may depend on your attachment style

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Are all single people insecure? When we think about people who have

been single for a long time, we may assume it's because single people have insecurities that make it difficult for them to find a partner or maintain a relationship.

But is this true? Or can long-term single people also be secure and thriving?

Our [latest research](#) published in the *Journal of Personality* suggests they can. However, perhaps unsurprisingly, not everybody tends to thrive in singlehood. Our study shows a crucial factor may be a person's attachment style.

## Singlehood is on the rise

Singlehood is on the rise around the world. In Canada, single status among [young adults](#) aged 25 to 29 has increased from [32% in 1981 to 61% in 2021](#). The number of people [living solo](#) has increased from 1.7 million people in 1981 to 4.4 million in 2021.

People are single for many reasons: [some choose](#) to remain single, some are focusing on [personal goals and aspirations](#), some report [dating has become harder](#), and some become single again due to a [relationship breakdown](#).

People may also remain single due to their [attachment style](#). Attachment theory is a popular and well-researched model of how we form relationships with other people. An [Amazon search for attachment theory](#) returns thousands of titles. The hashtag #attachmenttheory has been viewed [over 140 million times](#) on TikTok alone.

## What does attachment theory say about relationships?

Attachment theory suggests our relationships with others are shaped by our degree of "anxiety" and "avoidance".

Attachment anxiety is a type of insecurity that leads people to feel anxious about relationships and worry about abandonment. Attachment avoidance leads people to feel uncomfortable with intimacy and closeness.

People who are lower in attachment anxiety and avoidance are considered "securely attached", and are comfortable depending on others, and giving and receiving intimacy.

Single people are often stereotyped as being [too clingy or non-committal](#). Research comparing single and coupled people also suggests single people have [higher levels of attachment insecurities](#) compared to people in relationships.

At the same time, evidence suggests many single people are choosing to remain single and [living happy lives](#).

## **Single people represent a diverse group of secure and insecure people**

In our latest research, our team of social and [clinical psychologists](#) examined single people's attachment styles and how they related to their happiness and well-being.

We carried out two studies, one of 482 younger single people and the other of 400 older long-term singles. We found overall 78% were categorized as insecure, with the other 22% being secure.

Looking at our results more closely, we found four distinct subgroups of

singles:

- secure singles are relatively comfortable with intimacy and closeness in relationships (22%)
- anxious singles question whether they are loved by others and worry about being rejected (37%)
- avoidant singles are uncomfortable getting close to others and prioritize their independence (23% of younger singles and 11% of older long-term singles)
- fearful singles have heightened anxiety about abandonment, but are simultaneously uncomfortable with intimacy and closeness (16% of younger singles and 28% of older long-term singles).

## **Insecure singles find singlehood challenging, but secure singles are thriving**

Our findings also revealed these distinct subgroups of singles have distinct experiences and outcomes.

Secure singles are happy being single, have a greater number of non-romantic relationships, and better relationships with family and friends. They meet their sexual needs outside [romantic relationships](#) and feel happier with their life overall. Interestingly, this group maintains moderate interest in being in a romantic relationship in the future.

Anxious singles tend to be the most worried about being single, have lower [self-esteem](#), feel less supported by close others and have some of the lowest levels of life satisfaction across all sub-groups.

Avoidant singles show the least interest in being in a romantic relationship and in many ways appear satisfied with singlehood. However, they also have fewer friends and [close relationships](#), and are

generally less satisfied with these relationships than secure singles. Avoidant singles also report less meaning in life and tend to be less happy compared to secure singles.

Fearful singles reported more difficulties navigating close relationships than secure singles. For instance, they were less able to regulate their emotions, and were less satisfied with the quality of their close relationships relative to secure singles. They also reported some of the lowest levels of life satisfaction across all sub-groups.

## **It's not all doom and gloom**

These findings should be considered alongside several relevant points. First, although most singles in our samples were insecure (78%), a sizeable number were secure and thriving (22%).

Further, simply being in a romantic relationship is not a panacea. Being in an unhappy relationship is linked to [poorer life outcomes](#) than being single.

It is also important to remember that attachment orientations are not necessarily fixed. They are open to [change](#) in response to life events.

Similarly, [sensitive and responsive behaviors](#) from close others and [feeling loved and cared about](#) by close others can soothe underlying attachment concerns and foster attachment security over time.

Our studies are some of the first to examine the diversity in attachment styles among single adults. Our findings highlight that many single people are secure and thriving, but also that more work can be done to help insecure single people feel more secure in order to foster happiness.

**More information:** Christopher A. Pepping et al, Diversity in singlehood experiences: Testing an attachment theory model of sub-groups of singles, *Journal of Personality* (2024). [DOI: 10.1111/jopy.12929](https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12929)

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Citation: Would you be happy as a long-term single? The answer may depend on your attachment style (2024, April 23) retrieved 24 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-04-happy-term-style.html>

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