

## General

# Separation Anxiety among Kindergarten Children and its Association with Parental Socialization

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The present study aimed at investigating the association between separation anxiety and parental socialization styles among a sample of kindergarten children in Amman city, Jordan. The study adopted the descriptive cross-sectional design. A sample of 300 kindergarten children were enrolled in this study. The researcher used a modified version of the separation anxiety scale in addition to the parental socialization styles scale. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) (v. 27, IBM Corp.). The results of the study showed that 8% (n=24) of the enrolled participants had a high level of separation anxiety, normality parenting style was adopted by 38.7% (n=116). The results showed that there was significant statistical association between separation anxiety and cruelty parenting style ( $r=0.465$ ,  $p=0.003$ ), overprotection parenting style ( $r=0.301$ ,  $p=0.000$ ), negligence parenting style ( $p=0.641$ ,  $p=0.04$ ), and normality ( $r=0.09$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). The results showed that separation anxiety is significantly associated with parental socialization styles in general ( $r=0.326$ ,  $p=0.007$ ).

## INTRODUCTION

The childhood stage is one of the most dangerous stages in an individual's life, on which the healthy growth of the child depends in the subsequent stages of development,<sup>1</sup> and that the defect in the first building – the childhood stage – results in a defect and disorder in the later stages of life. Most psychologists have agreed that the first years of a child's life is the basis for the formation of his personality, and if this disorder does not receive early treatment, it may result in other disorders such as depression, stubbornness, and counter-behavior.<sup>2</sup> The "Generation and Ann" study indicated that separation anxiety is excessive and inappropriate for the child's psychological and social development, and may lead to his feeling isolated from the child.<sup>3</sup> Research has shown that the child may face types of anxiety disorders in childhood, including separation anxiety, which is a common type at this critical stage of the child's life,<sup>4</sup> which reflects the positive and negative forms parental attitudes, as the child feels that his environment around him is unsafe and threatens his existence will negatively affect his psychological structure and the structure of his personality, and its effects on him may be harsh and dangerous,<sup>5</sup> especially if the matter is related to his parents and the relationship between them and him and what he wants. This relationship resulted in influential events that make him lack love, tenderness, and insecurity, and thus makes him taste the pain of deprivation, which causes the emergence of his separation anxiety.<sup>6</sup>

Parental attitudes in the family are of great importance and a distinctive role in the process of upbringing and

preparing the child for life.<sup>7</sup> The parents present to him from their experience and behavior the behavioral models that he must learn in his early childhood years so that he extends himself outside his personal framework, trying to approach his behavior with the behavior of others to confirm his social status.<sup>8</sup> These attitudes with which the child is treated are positive, and this helps him to grow properly and adapt to the social milieu in which he lives appropriately.<sup>9</sup> Separation with parents as a result of separation or the threat of separation are at risk of developing separation anxiety and that they have shown higher fears than students who had a safe history, and studies have shown that the relationship between negative parental attitudes and disturbed behavior such as separation anxiety for their children is a direct relationship and vice versa, if the parental attitudes are positive.<sup>10</sup> The type of attachment between the child and his parents is a secure attachment, as his separation from them is gradual and proper, during which the child does not feel anxious, fear and stress.<sup>11</sup> The present study aimed at investigating the association between separation anxiety and parental socialization styles among a sample of Jordanian kindergarten children.

## METHODOLOGY

### RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study adopted the cross-sectional research design. This research design is useful in collecting data from a study population at a specific time interval and characterized as quick and cheap design that is used to study specific variables through a short time period.

## RESEARCH POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The present study was performed over the population of kindergarten children in Amman city, Jordan. Simple random sampling was used to recruit a sample of 300 subjects from different kindergartens within different areas in Amman city, Jordan. The sample were chosen randomly to ensure that every member in the study population has the same chance of being enrolled in this study.

## DATA COLLECTION TOOL

## 1. SEPARATION ANXIETY SCALE

The researcher adopted the scale (Mendez et al: 2014) that was developed based on the standards of the American Diagnostic Manual (DSM4) in setting its paragraphs consisting of (40) items, and the researcher translated the scale while making sure to maintain the standards and procedures for translating approved psychological tests and scales and making it suitable for the current research context.

## 2. PARENTAL SOCIALIZATION SCALE

This scale aims to measure the methods of parental treatment as perceived by children emanating from one or both parents, which they follow through their treatment of them, and which affect the growth of their personalities, whether intended for guidance or education. The scale consists of (57) items that measure four domains:

**Cruelty:** This method is represented in the use of parents in the process of raising the child and normalizing him socially, everything that leads to provoking physical pain, such as punishment (beating) or threatening it, and the number of its items is (14) items.

**Overprotection:** The fulfilment by one or both parents on behalf of their child of the duties and responsibilities that he or she should perform. That is, protecting the child and interfering in all his affairs, and the number of its items is (15) items.

**Negligence:** Parents leave their child without encouragement or accountability when he performs desirable or undesirable behaviour, in addition to leaving him without directing him to what he should do or do, and the number of its items is (15) items.

**Normality:** It is represented in the practice of normal methods from the educational and psychological point of view, which is that the parents follow normal methods based on modern educational methods of treatment by parents and the number of its items is (13).

The validity of the separation anxiety scale and the parental socialization scale were verified through a number of experts specialized in the field of educational psychology and mental health issues. To ensure the reliability of the study scales, a pilot sample of 50 kindergarten children were recruited in the pilot study. The reliability was ensured through test-retest method and Cronbach's alpha coefficient and it was found the reliability coefficient for the separation anxiety scale was 0.78 and 0.76 using the test-

**Table 1. Baseline and Socio-demographic characteristics of the enrolled children (n=300)**

| Variable                           | F (%)      |
|------------------------------------|------------|
| Gender                             |            |
| 1. Male                            | 186 (62)   |
| 2. Female                          | 114 (38)   |
| Father's educational qualification |            |
| 1. Illiterate                      | 21 (7)     |
| 2. Secondary or less               | 35 (11.7)  |
| 3. Undergraduate                   | 210 (70)   |
| 4. Postgraduate                    | 34 (11.3)  |
| Mother's educational qualification |            |
| 1. Illiterate                      | 35 (11.7)  |
| 2. Secondary or less               | 56 (18.7)  |
| 3. Undergraduate                   | 190 (63.3) |
| 4. Postgraduate                    | 19 (6.3)   |

**Table 2. Levels of separation anxiety among the study participants (n=300)**

| Level of separation anxiety | F (%)    |
|-----------------------------|----------|
| None to low                 | 189 (63) |
| Moderate                    | 87 (29)  |
| High                        | 24 (8)   |

retest and Cronbach's alpha coefficient, respectively. For the parental socialization scale, the reliability coefficient were 0.81 and 0.73 using the Cronbach's alpha and test-retest methods, respectively.

## RESULTS

The present study aimed at investigating the association between separation anxiety and parental socialization among a sample of kindergarten school children. The results presented in [table \(1\)](#) showed the baseline socio-demographic characteristics of the enrolled participants. Females constituted 38% (n=114) of the enrolled subjects, whereas 62% (N=186) were males. Categorizing the subjects based on their father's educational qualification revealed that illiterate fathers were 7% (n=21) of the enrolled subjects' fathers, whereas 11.7% (N=35) were secondary or less, 70% (n=210) had an undergraduate level of education and 11.3% (n=34) had a postgraduate education level. Moreover, categorizing the subjects' mothers based on their educational levels revealed that 11.7% (n=35) were illiterate, 18.7% (n=56) were secondary or less, 63.3% (n=190) had an undergraduate level of education and 6.3% (n=19) had postgraduate levels.

The results presented in [table \(2\)](#) represent the participants' distribution based on their level of separation anxiety. The results showed that 63% (n=189) had none to low level of separation anxiety, whereas 29% (n=89) and 8% (n=24) had moderate and high levels of separation anxiety, respectively.

The results presented in [table \(3\)](#) show the prevalence of parental socialization domains among the enrolled par-

**Table 3. Prevalence of parental socialization styles among the enrolled participants (n=300)**

| Parental socialization | F (%)      |
|------------------------|------------|
| Cruelty                | 12 (4)     |
| Overprotection         | 163 (54.3) |
| Negligence             | 9 (3)      |
| Normality              | 116 (38.7) |

Participants. The results showed that 4% (n=12) adopted the cruelty parental socialization styles, 54.3% (n=163) adopted the overprotection parental styles, whereas 3% (n=9) and 38.7% (n=116) adopted the negligence and normality parental socialization styles, respectively.

The results presented in [table \(4\)](#) show the Pearson’s correlation coefficients between the separation anxiety and parental socialization styles. The results showed that there was significant statistical association between separation anxiety and cruelty parenting style ( $r=0.465$ ,  $p=0.003$ ), overprotection parenting style ( $r=0.301$ ,  $p=0.000$ ), negligence parenting style ( $r=0.641$ ,  $p=0.04$ ), and normality ( $r=0.09$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). The results showed that separation anxiety is significantly associated with parental socialization styles in general ( $r=0.326$ ,  $p=0.007$ ).

## DISCUSSION

Separation anxiety is a normal and common experience for children, especially during the preschool and early school years. It refers to the distress that a child experiences when separated from a primary caregiver, such as a parent or other family member.<sup>12</sup> Children with separation anxiety may worry excessively about losing their caregivers, fear being away from home, or have trouble sleeping without a parent nearby. In some cases, they may also experience physical symptoms, such as headaches or stomachaches, when separated.<sup>13</sup>

While separation anxiety is a normal part of development, it can be distressing for both children and their caregivers. To help a child manage separation anxiety, it’s important to provide reassurance, consistency, and structure.<sup>14</sup> This can include creating a predictable routine, making sure your child knows what to expect when separated, and offering comforting items, such as a special toy or blanket. Gradual exposure to brief separations can also help children get used to being away from their caregivers and build their confidence.<sup>15</sup>

If your child’s separation anxiety is affecting their daily life or causing significant distress, it’s important to seek professional help.<sup>16</sup> A mental health professional can help

identify the underlying causes of your child’s anxiety and develop an appropriate treatment plan, which may include therapy or medication.<sup>14</sup>

Our findings showed that separation anxiety is significantly associated with parenting styles. This might be referred to that parenting style can have an impact on a child’s level of anxiety. Research has shown that children who are raised in an authoritarian parenting style, where there is a lot of control and pressure to conform to strict rules and expectations, may be more likely to experience anxiety. On the other hand, children who are raised in a more supportive and responsive parenting style, where parents are involved and responsive to their child’s needs and feelings, may be less likely to experience anxiety.<sup>17</sup>

A parenting style that balances warmth and nurturing with appropriate limits and structure, known as authoritative parenting, has been shown to be associated with the least amount of anxiety in children.<sup>18</sup> This style emphasizes open communication, mutual respect, and encourages independence and self-regulation in children. It’s also important to note that parenting style is just one factor that can contribute to a child’s level of anxiety. Other factors, such as genetics, temperament, and life experiences, can also play a role. That being said, a supportive and involved parenting style can help reduce the risk of anxiety and promote overall well-being in children.<sup>17,18</sup>

Overprotective parenting, also known as helicopter parenting, can contribute to anxiety in children. When parents are overly protective, they may constantly monitor their child’s activities, make decisions for them, and intervene in their problems, instead of allowing their child to solve problems on their own and develop independence.<sup>19</sup>

This type of parenting can lead to feelings of anxiety in children because it sends the message that the child is not capable of handling challenges and making decisions on their own.<sup>20</sup> It can also lead to a lack of trust in their own abilities and a fear of making mistakes, which can further contribute to anxiety.<sup>19</sup>

In addition, children who are raised in an overprotective environment may struggle with coping skills and resilience, as they have not had the opportunity to develop these skills through experiencing challenges and overcoming obstacles on their own. This can make them more susceptible to anxiety and stress later in life.<sup>21</sup>

It’s important for parents to strike a balance between being supportive and allowing their child to take risks and make mistakes, as this can help promote their child’s independence and resilience. Encouraging children to solve problems on their own and make their own decisions in a safe and supportive environment can help build their confidence and reduce the risk of anxiety.

**Table 4. Pearson’s correlation coefficients between parental socialization styles and separation anxiety (n=300)**

|                    | Cruelty                | Overprotection         | Negligence            | Normality             | Total                  |
|--------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Separation anxiety | $r=0.465$<br>$p=0.003$ | $r=0.301$<br>$p=0.000$ | $r=0.641$<br>$p=0.04$ | $r=0.09$<br>$p=0.000$ | $r=0.326$<br>$p=0.007$ |

## CONCLUSION

The study concluded that among Jordanian kindergarten children, there is a significant association between parenting socialization styles and separation anxiety. The study concluded that normal parenting socialization significantly associated with lower levels of separation anxiety. Based on the study findings, the researcher recommend conducting further awareness campaigns to improve parents' awareness regarding the appropriate parenting styles and how to practice normal parenting styles, which would significantly improve the mental health of the kindergarten children. In addition, the researcher recommend conducting further cross-sectional studies to cover different academic stages and different geographical areas in Jordan and at the local context.

However, a number of limitations are considered in this study. One limitation is the use of convenience sampling

method that imposes selection bias. In addition, the geographical limitations as this study was performed in Amman city. Therefore, other geographical areas are not included in this study and the results might not be generalized due to differences in the socio-economic and demographic backgrounds of the kindergarten children.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest

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